

## A Cure for the Curse of Chiropractic, Part One

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This two-part article briefly outlines three approaches to help cure the *curse of chiropractic*. First, we need to develop a proper view of philosophy. Second, we need to have an accurate understanding of chiropractic history. Third, we need to understand the scientific advancements that have taken place in the past several years and particularly since 1927, when R.W. Stephenson described the curse.

### Embracing Real Philosophy

It's almost paradoxical to consider that one of the cures for the curse of chiropractic is philosophy. *Philosophy* literally means the love of wisdom, which comes from the Greek word "φιλοσοφία" which translates as *philo-sophia* (*philo*=love, and *sophia*=wisdom).<sup>1</sup> When it comes to applying philosophy to a profession, the realization of wisdom and knowledge related to the profession should be the goal. Indeed, philosophy also is defined as the "critical study of the basic principles and concepts of a particular branch of knowledge, especially with a view to improving or reconstituting them."<sup>2</sup>

With these two definitions of philosophy in mind, how is it possible that chiropractic students and doctors can believe that philosophy is about believing in, or having faith in the immaterial? Faith in the immaterial (i.e., God) is the purpose of religion and a personal matter, and not the purpose of a profession devoted largely to the care of the spine. The most telling example of chiropractic confusion regarding philosophy is the notion that *immaterial* forces, impulses or intelligence can be interfered with in the IVF by a *material* spinal dysfunction called subluxation, which is somehow viewed as "chiropractic philosophy." Stephenson was very clear that this notion is pure fantasy, not philosophy; and, in fact, Stephenson was quite harsh regarding the foolishness of this fantasy, which he referred to as the curse of chiropractic that corrupts the science of chiropractic.<sup>3</sup>

With the above in mind, consider Durant's commentary on Socrates, wherein he stated: "Philosophy begins when one learns to doubt – particularly to doubt one's cherished beliefs, one's dogmas and one's axioms."<sup>4</sup> The Socratic method is characterized by a demand for accurate definitions, clear thinking and exact analysis, none of which typically is applied by those who defend the curse of chiropractic.<sup>4</sup> Consider for example, recent papers by Koch,<sup>5</sup> Gelardi,<sup>6</sup> McAulay<sup>7</sup> and Gross.<sup>8</sup> Not one involved an attempt to critically examine or improve upon a single chiropractic belief, axiom or principle. And not one paper expressed even the slightest of doubts in a single chiropractic belief, axiom or principle, which is a powerful testimony to the lack of real philosophy which permeates the segment of the profession that paradoxically espouses the importance of philosophy.

Students, in particular, get confused about philosophy. After listening to dogma that is called "philosophy," many students and chiropractors develop an anti-philosophy position, which is a grave mistake. We need to be anti-dogma and pro-philosophy. If real philosophy were embraced by chiropractors, we would not be encumbered by the curse of chiropractic.

## Understanding Key Historical Events and Terminology as History, Not Philosophy

Evidence suggests that our unique chiropractic vernacular and "chiropractic philosophy" were strongly advanced for the purpose of legal protection in the early 1900s. While metaphysical constructs were part of the original chiropractic theory, they were in no way forced upon students or the public. In fact, the opposite may be true.

I was fortunate to recently come across a photocopy of two pages (pp. 15-16) from the Dec. 13, 1902 issue of the *Davenport Times*. The full two pages was an advertisement for chiropractic by B.J. Palmer, wherein he laid claim to curing numerous conditions and proposed that chiropractic was a better way than medicine. B.J. Palmer did not state that the adjustment removes subluxation, and that Innate within the body does the healing. Nor did B.J. Palmer focus on metaphysics. He focused much of the advertisement on the needs of the patient. In other words, B.J. Palmer was not without a patient-centered approach in 1902.

The predominately metaphysical promotion of chiropractic did not come into play until about five years later, in 1907. This appears to have occurred out of legal necessity, rather than choice. In short, chiropractors claimed to cure disease with the adjustment, which led to chiropractors being jailed for practicing medicine without a license. So, we had to develop a defense and a unique chiropractic philosophy was the defense. Consider the following sequence of events:

1. In 1907, a chiropractor practicing in Wisconsin (Dr. Shegataro Morikubo) contacts B.J. Palmer for help with legal defense. Morikubo is charged with practicing osteopathy without a license.
2. Attorney Tom Morris is contacted by B.J. Palmer to defend Morikubo and keep him from going to jail.
3. Morris utilizes *Modernized Chiropractic* by Smith, Langworthy and Paxon, wherein they indicate that a profession is defined by its philosophy and related practice.
4. Morikubo is successfully defended by the unique "chiropractic philosophy" defense developed by Morris.
5. Over the next 22 years, Morris is involved in some 3,300 similar cases and successfully defends chiropractors approximately 85 percent to 90 percent of the time with the unique "chiropractic philosophy" defense.
6. Stephenson's text was published in 1927, at the tail end of Morris' 22-year reign of defending chiropractors with the "chiropractic philosophy" argument. It is therefore not surprising that Stephenson's text is consistent with Morris' metaphysical "chiropractic philosophy" argument.

The above represents an abbreviated version of the early legal defense of chiropractors. For the details, please see Keating's excellent text *BJ of Davenport: The Early Years* (1997), published by the Association for the History of Chiropractic, which is headquartered at Palmer College in Davenport. Keating's insightful text provides many not-too-well-known important statements by early leaders of the chiropractic profession. For example, regarding the defense of early chiropractors, B.J. Palmer stated in 1951:

"We are always mindful of those early days when UCA ... used various expedients to defeat medical court prosecutions. We legally squirmed this way and that, here and there. We did not diagnose, treat or cure disease. We analyze, adjusted cause, and Innate in the patient cure. All were profession matters of fact in science, therefore justifiable in legal use to defeat medical trials and convictions."

It might surprise some readers to discover that B.J. Palmer and John Howard (who founded the

National School of Chiropractic - now known as the National University of Health Sciences) agreed on this fact. In other words, it was well known that we created unique terminology and a unique "philosophy" for the purpose of legal protection. Howard stated:

"It has always been a sore in my eye to see how some who profess to be disciples of DD Palmer have tried and still insist on narrowing the science down to a simple technique. In the early days it was necessary to protect the 'child' (as DD was wont to refer to his Chiropractic) by evasive terminology in order to avoid the chill and ice of the law and 'analysis' was used for diagnosis, 'adjustment:' was employed for treatment, 'pressure on the nerve' was used for reflex stimulation or inhibition, etc. These terms were garments to protect the child until legal clothing could be secured."

Perhaps the legal battle to save chiropractic is why B.J. Palmer so strongly advocated "chiropractic philosophy" as our salvation; to keep us a distinct profession, and to preserve the profession. This would certainly be a reasonable position to take, considering our profession's early struggles with political medicine at that time.

However, as we enter 2007, chiropractors are licensed in all 50 states and in numerous countries throughout the world. We are a distinct profession. Accordingly, we have no reason to rely on "chiropractic philosophy," as developed by Morris and B.J. Palmer, for legal protection or as a rationale for practicing chiropractic in the modern day.

Regretfully, Morris' "legal strategy" remains the ideology that we unfortunately call "chiropractic philosophy." In the past, chiropractic philosophy clearly served a useful purpose. However, today it serves to keep us marginalized as a profession and unable to acquire cultural authority, and seems to be embraced mostly by those who are possessed by the curse of chiropractic. This needs to change immediately.

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*Editor's note:* Part two of this article will appear in the Feb. 12, 2007 issue of *DC*.

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