

OLD DAD CHIRO
(DD PALMER'S)

Timeless Wisdom

BY ZAIL KHALSA, D.C.

Today's chiropractic field is marked by the coexistence of two distinct paradigms. On one hand, we have a reductionist view that regards humans as nothing more than biological entities in a random universe. On the other, there's a belief in a universal intelligence or consciousness that we are all a part of.

Approximately two decades ago, I found myself contemplating an intriguing question: If DD Palmer, the esteemed founder of chiropractic, were alive in our modern era, what teachings and practices would he impart? This question isn't just speculative; it aims to bridge the historic foundations of chiropractic with contemporary thought and practice.

DD Palmer himself was driven by curiosity and a desire to understand human health on a profound level. He pondered why, under seemingly identical conditions, one person might succumb to illness while another remains unaffected. His pursuit of this question led to the birth of the chiropractic profession.

Today's chiropractic field is marked by the coexistence of two distinct paradigms. On one hand, we have a reductionist view that regards humans as nothing more than biological entities in a random universe. On the other, there's a belief in a universal intelligence or consciousness that we are all a part of. These perspectives might seem irreconcilable at first glance.

However, history and philosophy teach us that when confronted with two opposing viewpoints, the most profound truth often emerges where both can declare, "Indeed, I was correct all along." This concept is eloquently encapsulated in the example of the blind men and the elephant, where each man perceives the animal differently based on the part they encounter, yet all are describing aspects of the same elephant.

Determined to find this overarching perspective in chiropractic—one that harmonizes the field's seemingly opposed paradigms—I embarked on a journey inspired by the insights gained from Tim Ferriss's "Tribe of Mentors." Ferriss introduces a heuristic that simplifies complex disciplines into three to five foundational principles. In my quest, I sought to distill chiropractic to its essence and discovered four core principles:

1 Health as a Fundamental Entity

Recognizing health not just as the absence of disease, but as an intrinsic quality of life.

2 The Skeletal Tension Framework

Understanding the critical role of our skeletal structure in maintaining overall health and well-being.

3 Nervous System Tone

Acknowledging the nervous system's central role in regulating bodily functions and facilitating the body's innate healing processes.

4 Universal Intelligence

Embracing the concept of a guiding force or intelligence that connects and influences all aspects of life, including health.

These principles encapsulate the essence of chiropractic, bridging historical wisdom with modern understanding. By returning to these core tenants, practitioners can navigate the complexities of health and wellness, ensuring that the spirit of DD Palmer's pioneering work continues to thrive in today's rapidly evolving world.

Health as the Central Focus

At the heart of chiropractic philosophy is an unwavering focus on health, an idea vividly encapsulated by DD Palmer, the progenitor of chiropractic. He introduced an approach that centers health as the primary entity, embodying what contemporary understanding would term a salutogenic model. This contrasts sharply with the pathogenic model prevalent in conventional medicine, which concentrates on the origins and mechanisms of disease.

Salutogenesis represents a paradigm shift, emphasizing the origins of health and well-being, rather than disease. This perspective aligns with the foundational principles laid out by William Harper, a pivotal figure in the development of chiropractic education during his tenure as president of the Texas Chiropractic College in the mid-20th century. In his notable, albeit underappreciated, work “Anything Can Cause Anything,” Harper underscored the non-linear dynamics of health, illustrating how disturbances within the nervous system can manifest unpredictably across the body. Through this lens, health is seen as the primary concern, focusing on promoting wellness and optimal functioning rather than merely combating illness.

This salutogenic focus is further highlighted by Clarence Gonstead, another luminary in the field, who succinctly differentiated between medicine and chiropractic: “Medicine is the study of disease and what causes a man to die. Chiropractic is the study of health and what causes a man to live.” This statement encapsulates the essence of chiropractic’s approach: a relentless pursuit of understanding and facilitating the conditions that foster life and health.

Central to this discussion is DD Palmer’s iconic inquiry into why one person may succumb to illness while another remains in robust health under the same conditions. This question probes the core of the salutogenic model—it is not merely the absence of illness that defines health, but the inherent capacity of individuals to adapt and thrive in the face of environmental and physiological challenges. The role of chiropractic, then, is to ensure that this adaptive capability is not hindered by vertebral subluxations or other forms of interference, thereby enabling individuals to maintain optimal health and wellness.

In essence, chiropractic is devoted to unlocking the salutogenic potential innate in all of us, advocating for a health-centered approach that nurtures life’s capacity to flourish. Through understanding and applying this core principle, chiropractic offers a profound and transformative perspective on health and well-being.



Unlocking the Neuro-Skeletal Tension Framework

The second foundational principle identified by DD Palmer in his pioneering work of 1914, a text greatly revered yet perhaps not as widely explored within the chiropractic community, delves into the Neuro-Skeletal Tension Framework. This principle can be likened to the contemporary understanding of fractal BioTensegrity, offering a sophisticated view of the body's structural integrity and its intricate connection with the nervous system.



Joe Keating, a prominent figure in chiropractic research, provides a compelling interpretation of this principle. In an insightful article, he reflects on DD Palmer's evolving understanding that nerve impulses are fundamentally vibrational in nature, drawing an elegant analogy to the strings of a guitar. This perspective envisions the nervous system as an elaborate network of fine threads, delicately interwoven across the body's skeletal framework. It evokes the image of a spider's web, gracefully suspended within a frame, where alterations to the frame's structure invariably affect the web's tension and integrity.

Keating further discusses the evolution of DD Palmer's thinking, notably moving beyond the early "foot on the hose" model, which likened spinal subluxation to a physical obstruction of nerve pathways. By the time Palmer penned "The Chiropractor's Adjuster," he had embraced a more nuanced understanding. He clarified the important distinction between a nerve being compressed ("pinched") and one being stretched or otherwise impinged upon. Palmer illustrated this concept using the analogy of a violin's bridge, which doesn't "pinch" the strings but rather modulates their tension, thereby altering their vibratory properties.

This shift in perspective underscores a profound insight: spinal subluxations and other structural alterations can modify the tension within the nervous system, impacting the flow and quality of nerve impulses without necessarily obstructing them. This understanding suggests that the chiropractic approach to health isn't solely about relieving physical blockages but is deeply concerned with restoring and optimizing the vibratory harmony within the neuro-skeletal framework.

Thus, DD Palmer's Neuro-Skeletal Tension Framework invites us to view the body not as a mere collection of parts but as a finely tuned instrument. Within this framework, chiropractic interventions aim to fine-tune the body's intricate balance, ensuring that every nerve and structure vibrates in harmonious concert. This approach opens up a richer understanding of health and healing, highlighting the chiropractic commitment to enhancing the body's innate vibratory resilience and capacity for well-being.



A Deeper Dive into Chiropractic Philosophy

DD Palmer, in his visionary approach to chiropractic, conceptualized the nervous system as an intricate web, akin to a meshwork of delicate threads, meticulously arranged across the body's skeletal framework. This vivid imagery encapsulates the principle that when a joint is subluxated, meaning it is misaligned or not moving correctly, it can result in the stretching or relaxation of these "nervous threads." The skeletal structure, thus, acts not merely as a framework but as a dynamic neuro-skeletal tension regulator, using the lever principle to influence nervous system integrity and function.

The significance of the bones in maintaining this tension and ensuring proper nerve function is further illuminated by the groundbreaking work of Alf Breig. His seminal text, "Adverse Mechanical Tension in the Central Nervous System," which remains one of chiropractic's most insightful yet underrecognized contributions, explores how alterations in spinal structure directly affect the tension within the spinal cord. Breig's investigations reveal how a healthy cervical curve facilitates a relaxed state in the spinal cord, whereas a reverse curve subjects the cord to detrimental tension.

This principle has recently received significant scientific validation through what could be considered a monumental experiment conducted by Dean Harrison and his team

at the University of Cairo, and published in the esteemed journal *Nature*. The study examined the impacts of cervical lordosis rehabilitation on central conduction time and neuroplastic changes, providing substantial evidence that a normal or healthy cervical curve is crucial for efficient nerve conduction and the orderly processing of information in the frontal cortex. Conversely, a loss of this normal curvature was associated with slower nerve conduction and a disorganized integration of information to the frontal cortex. Remarkably, the study demonstrated that through chiropractic interventions aimed at restoring the cervical curve, normal nerve function and information processing could be reestablished.

This groundbreaking research serves as a compelling scientific endorsement of the neuro-skeletal tension framework posited by DD Palmer. It underscores a fundamental chiropractic principle: that the structure of the spine is inextricably linked to the functional integrity of the nervous system. By adjusting the spine to its optimal shape, chiropractic care not only addresses physical disalignment but also facilitates the body's natural ability to heal and maintain optimal neurological function.

Therefore, the neuro-skeletal tension framework, as envisioned by DD Palmer and further elucidated by successive researchers and practitioners, offers a profound understanding of the body's interconnectedness. It illustrates how chiropractic goes beyond mere physical adjustments, aiming to harmonize the entire nervous system, thus enhancing overall health and well-being.

Understanding the Principle of Tone in Chiropractic

The discussion now advances to the principle of tone, a cornerstone concept elucidated in DD Palmer's seminal 1910 publication. Today, this principle can be paralleled with the field of neurophysiology, which encompasses the functional neurology approaches in chiropractic. While the Neuro-Skeletal Tension Framework leans more towards the structural facets of chiropractic care, the principle of tone delves into the intricate dynamics of neurological function and response.

Prominent figures in the chiropractic community, such as Kerik, emphasize that adjustments are not merely about relieving or applying tension to nerves but are primarily focused on impacting mechanoreceptors. Furthermore, researchers like Heidi Havoc have shifted the conversation beyond structural adjustments to pinpoint the broader implications on neural mechanisms. This broad spectrum of interpretations underscores the richness of chiropractic science, suggesting that there's a cohesive understanding that could validate the diverse perspectives within the field.

DD Palmer, in a groundbreaking assertion, proclaimed that chiropractic's scientific foundation is rooted in the concept of "tone." This notion transcends the mere physicality to encompass variations in structure, temperature, tonicity, elasticity, and tension—with tone serving as the benchmark of health. Any deviation from this equilibrium is classified as disease. Among the key elements DD Palmer introduces is "renitency," a term describing the property of reflex action or the inherent responsiveness and adaptability of biological tissue. This concept is integral to understanding the chiropractic notion of the safety pin cycle, where the brain and body's interconnectedness hinge on this reflex action. A subluxation can impair this critical responsiveness, leading to a disruption in the body's natural regulatory feedback loops.

Palmer elucidates that reflex action embodies the impulse's resilience, the transmission of sensory experiences from the central nervous system to the periphery, and vice versa. The degree of physiological function is contingent upon this capacity for renitency—the impulsive force generated through this dynamic bounce-back mechanism. This principle finds its roots in the inherent irritability of protoplasm, illustrating the fundamental responsiveness of living tissues to external stimuli, be it contracting towards sustenance or recoiling from harm.

My research, anchored in the molecular genetics of tetrahymena, explored early developments in what is now known as epigenetics, showcasing the capacity for adaptability and response in cellular organisms. This research underscores the principle of tone as a reflection of the living tissue's intrinsic ability to navigate its environment—a testament to the dynamic and responsive nature of all living systems.

Thus, the principle of tone in chiropractic goes beyond the structural integrity of the spine, embracing a more comprehensive view of health as a harmonious balance of responsiveness and adaptability within the nervous system. This concept invites a deeper exploration into neurophysiology, emphasizing the significance of maintaining optimal neural function for overall health and well-being.



Universal Intelligence: Bridging Chiropractic and Contemporary Science

The concept of Universal Intelligence stands as DD Palmer's foundational premise in chiropractic, encapsulating a view of the universe wherein all matter is imbued with a form of intelligence that grants it properties, actions, and sustains its existence. This notion aligns with the modern philosophical concept of protopanpsychism, which posits that the potential for consciousness is inherent in all matter, organizing itself in ways that give rise to conscious, sentient beings.

This perspective diverges significantly from the reductionist view of humans as mere biological automatons navigating a purposeless universe. Instead, it elevates the understanding of human beings as conscious entities, integral to a universe where matter and consciousness interweave. The early pioneers of quantum physics, often regarded as mystics, shared a similar sentiment. Fritz Schrodinger, for instance, recognized individual consciousness as a manifestation of a unified consciousness permeating the cosmos.

Contemporary physics has come to recognize mass, spin, and charge as fundamental properties of the universe, yet figures like Sir Roger Penrose, a Nobel Prize laureate in Physics, advocate for the inclusion of consciousness as a fundamental aspect of our universe. Penrose suggests that any physical theory omitting consciousness offers an incomplete depiction of the world, echoing the chiropractic view of universal intelligence or consciousness as a fundamental component of existence. In the world of medicine and biology, we are beginning to realize just how important consciousness is for developing a scientific understanding of the biological mechanisms and processes underlying health and recovery. Echoing Roger Penrose in physics, we may say that equally in healthcare, any theory that leaves apart consciousness is incomplete.

DD Palmer's insights into universal intelligence find resonance in today's scientific dialogues. He posited that the universe is a composition of intelligence and matter, where matter, devoid of intelligence or creativity, serves as a vessel for the expression of life through the omnipresent intelligence that fills all space. This intelligence, according to Palmer, is constantly striving towards perfection, with life being the result of this creative force's manifestations.

This convergence between Palmer's chiropractic principles and modern scientific thought invites a deeper exploration into the nature of consciousness and its role in the universe. By recognizing the interconnectedness of intelligence, consciousness, and matter, we open the door to a more holistic understanding of health, well-being, and the essence of life itself. As contemporary science advances, it increasingly validates the chiropractic view that the universe is a dynamic interplay of matter and a pervasive, intelligent consciousness, offering a profound and potentially unifying perspective on the nature of existence.



Synthesizing DD Palmer's Chiropractic Principles for Today's Practice

In summarizing DD Palmer's profound contributions to chiropractic, we distill his teachings into four pivotal principles: **Health as the Central Entity**, the **Neuro-Skeletal Tension Framework**, **Tone**, and **Universal Intelligence**. These principles, akin to the branches of a tree stretching in multiple directions, represent diverse facets of chiropractic philosophy and practice, each contributing to a holistic understanding of health and well-being.



Zail Khalsa, M.S., D.C., has been living a chiropractic wellness lifestyle for five decades and practicing as a chiropractor for four decades in So. California. Living a healthy chiropractic lifestyle helped him recover from the side effects of surgery and radiation treatment for a childhood cancer that was expected to kill him and had left him with nerve paralysis. He applies what he learned on this journey to help his patients live healthier and happier lives.

Chiropractic, much like a tree reaching towards the sunlight, is driven by a core thesis introduced by DD Palmer. The varied branches of this tree—each representing different methodologies, practices, and focuses within chiropractic—demonstrate the field's adaptability and breadth. Some practitioners might lean towards a philosophy-heavy approach, emphasizing the principle of Universal Intelligence and its implications for health and healing. Others might prioritize structural and functional concerns, aligning their practice with the Neuro-Skeletal Tension Framework through methodologies like Chiropractic Biophysics, which I personally practice alongside principle-straight chiropractic.

Further branching out, there are those who delve into the realms of neurophysiology, embracing approaches that seek to optimize neural function and communication within the body. The works of practitioners like Kerrick and Havik exemplify this focus, highlighting the crucial role of neural health and responsiveness—what DD Palmer referred to as “Tone”—in overall wellness.

Such diversity in practice and focus does not dilute chiropractic's essence but rather underscores its comprehensive nature—a “salutogenic model of vertebral subluxation centric care,” as termed by the International Federation of Chiropractors and Organizations (IFCO). This salutogenic approach, firmly grounded in the principles laid out by Palmer, champions the promotion of health and the prevention of disease through the identification and management of vertebral subluxations.

Were DD Palmer with us today, practicing and teaching in this modern era, it's conceivable that he would champion a salutogenic model of care that integrates these diverse principles. This approach would not only acknowledge the inherent intelligence and capability within all living beings but also leverage the specific mechanisms—be it through addressing the neuro-skeletal tension framework, optimizing tone, or fostering an understanding of universal intelligence—to support the body's natural ability to heal and thrive.

In essence, DD Palmer's foundational principles offer a versatile framework for contemporary chiropractic practice. By embracing the complexity and interconnectivity of these principles, practitioners can cultivate a practice that is adaptable, holistic, and deeply attuned to the multifaceted nature of health and well-being. 🌱