

GRADUATION TALK
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Looking forward to tonight I found myself thinking about my sister Marya's graduation from Chiropractic College in Minnesota many years ago. It took me a little while to see what had put me in mind of that occasion, and I'll get to that in a moment, but first I'd like to set the stage by talking about my connections with chiropractic practice.

My family seems to be liberally laced with people who have been drawn to the chiropractic profession. Grandfather's brother, Lee Crabtree, seems to have been a practitioner of some note in Arizona; my sister, her husband, my nephew, his wife—and maybe some more that I don't even know about, who have gotten entangled with chiropractic.

[By the way, I can't help but notice that one of our graduates this evening is a chiropractor.]

Now, in contrast, you will not find among my relations one medical doctor. So I suppose you could say that I seem to be connected with a lot of people who are drawn to the unconventional.

My first point here is that when you go into a non-medical healing profession, you probably feel more keenly that it is passion that keeps you going, since, at least in our culture today, public prestige and financial reward are not that much in evidence.

In a very real way, it is this passion that keeps you open to new ideas, ideas about what really works, how you can really help people.

Now let me get back to my sister Marya's graduation from Chiropractic College. The night before, she and her husband had a party with other about-to-be graduates, and during that party, her husband—eager to practice his art—said he would give me an adjustment. I willingly accepted, because I had been bothered by a nagging back pain for the previous four months. Well, in about 10 minutes

that pain was gone—and, by the way, it never came back. So I was impressed by this thing my sister and he had been studying.

The next day was the ceremony, and I sat in the audience. Before the handing out of degrees, we were treated to a talk by the then vice president of the American Chiropractic Association, who was now president elect of the Association. He spoke eloquently about the hard work the graduates had put into their training, and made a point to emphasize the importance of their continuing to learn about their art. “So,” he said, “make sure that you continue to study and read books about your healing work. But be careful to read only those books approved by the American Chiropractic Association.”

I couldn't believe my ears. Here all this time I had seen chiropractors as the positive rebels, relegated to the outskirts of the professional community, but bravely soldiering on in their nonconformist ways. Now I was hearing their new leader counseling the grossest of conformity. All this freshness and openness I had seen in my sister and her husband and their fellow graduates seemed besmirched by these comments.

I asked Marya about it afterwards. She explained that recently the government had taken the unprecedented step of allowing chiropractic work to be paid for under health insurance. So now, suddenly, the profession was no longer on the fringe, but had been given approved status. Now, it seemed, the powers that be in the chiropractic hierarchy were going to show that they could be just as rigid as so many medical people had proven to be.

What I am getting at here is that one's unconventionality and openness to the new and true can sometimes be quite fragile, and that it does not take long for the unconventional to become the conventional—especially when enticed by financial reward and a sense of place in society.

But money and prestige are not the only things that can quell healthy nonconformity. Fear of disapproval, the longing for the familiar, and just plain old laziness or attachment to the habitual can do it too.

To be fair, I must not talk about this is a one-sided way. You might say that perhaps those young chiropractic bucks needed a bit of calming down. They were enthusiastic for all that was new in the profession at the time. I remember that they had learned to practice acupuncture, and were among the first chiropractors to use it in the U.S. They, might, one might fear, be attracted to fringe techniques, unproven and dangerous. Besides, had they not spent hard years of study on the tried and true methods of chiropractic? Of course they had. And were they now to disregard the wisdom contain in those tested methods? Of course not.

I do not intend by my words to disparage the hard earned wisdom of the past. It is not a matter of new=good and old=bad. That formula will not work. In fact, the truth is there is no *formula* at all. What there is, is passion. And right at the heart of that passion is the desire to help people heal and find themselves. So the guiding principle will be: put the welfare of your client first, above all else.

If you follow passion, you cannot go wrong. If you follow passion, you will become skilled at using the tried and true. If you follow passion, you will be open to new ways of looking at things that hold some hope of promise for your client. If you follow passion you will learn to pay attention to your therapeutic instincts and your divine intuition.

This reminds me that in my office I have a plaque with a quote from William Blake that says, "Imagination is evidence of the divine." I really believe that. What is divine in us takes us beyond what is simply given, into the broad vista of what is possible. What is divine in us takes us beyond rote learning to inspired insight. What is divine in us also gives us no rest--in that we can never be satisfied with where we are. It pushes us beyond present accomplishments to what is waiting next for us.

I believe it right to also say that "passion is evidence of the divine." Our imagination is only stirred in a fruitful way when it is driven by passion. What,

after all, is passion but a powerful, inner-driven interest in something, a deeply rooted attitude toward life and the world. Passion is not merely an emotion. It gathers up the fullness of who you are and directs it toward the object of your passion. It is what makes life worth living, gives it its zest. A passion can be about anything—in a way, its object is secondary. What is important is the sense of the full force of your capacities--your whole self--aligned to action and interaction.

This kind of powerful interest makes us capable of doing things we could never do from any lesser feeling. If we have this kind of passion about being therapists, our work will be inspired, we will be as good at what we do as we possibly can be.

We will continue to learn, no doubt. And we will read more than just what is approved by the American Psychoanalytic Association. We will learn from the old, and from the new, and we will learn from our own experience and from the lessons taught us by the divine within.

Shahroze, Gord, Jeanine, Anne—You are all here because of your passion for the work of psychotherapy, a passion that got you over many hurdles and that kept you going through hard times. It is a passion that also inspired you and gave you that feeling of awe that periodically happens when something truly special takes place in the work. At those moments, like every truly passionate person, you feel yourselves part of something more than you can explain, the locus of some special intervention. It is that passion that got you here, and I fondly hope you will continue to experience that passion in all the days to come.