

Gratitude – Next Stop – Happiness

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Gratitude is not a place, though it has been the next stop in my journey. I attended C-1 at the Pankey Institute in 1997. I was 35 years old, just 7 years out of dental school. Jay Anderson and Bill Gregg were the teaching assistants given the task of bringing the techniques, instructions, stories and philosophy of Dr. L.D. Pankey to life for the new class of greenhorns. We were in the old building across the street, and I remember walking to the lot to see where the new Institute would be built.

During the week I realized that I was learning more than dentistry, and the experience felt good. It was my first introduction to Aristotle's Cross of Life. I left Key Biscayne with a seed of happiness planted within me. In fact, 22 seeds were planted that week and in countless C-1 students in the history of the Institute.

Seeds are an incredible creation when you think about it. Within that tiny pod lies all the potential to create life, beauty, bounty, strength, and wisdom. All that a seed needs is fertile soil and a little water, to take root and grow with the potential that it was given.

As I have been preparing for my Pankey Scholar class, I find myself reflecting and living in the spirit of Dr. Pankey and the Institute. I could not resist the urge to write and express my feelings and gratitude for now allowing me to help others around me find the greatness and happiness within them. If the students of the Institute provide the fertile ground, visiting faculty plow and sow those fields, while the resident faculty are in charge of tending the fields, daily by nurturing the crops, and finally harvesting the bounty of its efforts.

Three years lapsed before I returned to the Institute. I had other interests and continued my dental continuing education elsewhere during my hiatus from the Institute. The thing that took me back, and that still carries me today, is Dr. Pankey's Cross of Dentistry. I have always loved what I do so "know your work" and "apply your knowledge" never seemed hard to put to practice. I worked on "knowing my patients," and this again did not prove hard.

Where I stumbled and, where I have continued to work and grow has been in "know yourself." I have come to appreciate and learn that this is the intangible material we learn at the Pankey Institute, that we cannot give a name to. But, "know yourself" has the

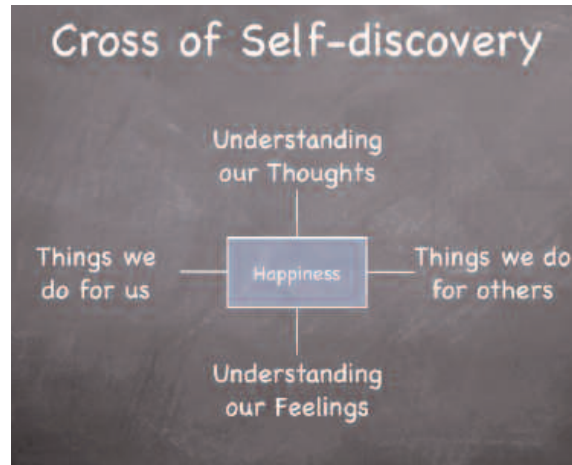
most meaning to those who love the ethics, morals and values displayed by the Institute, its faculty and staff. This, I believe, was the intention of Dr. Pankey and the Cadre who initially formed the foundation of the Pankey Institute. It is alive and well today, and continues to be passed down to its students.

These days I am always in the company of gratitude. I have chosen to leave the past behind me and allow myself to forgive. Forgiving is not something we do for others, it is actually something we do for ourselves.

Rev. Michael Beckwith of the Agape Unity Church in L.A. says that "un-forgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die." Why do we choose to feel the pain and re-enact past hardships? Rev. Beckwith goes on to say that "true forgiveness is giving up the hope that the past could not have been any different." Nothing new can come into our lives until we are grateful for what we already have.

It is much easier to be thankful and give gratitude for having had those experiences and learning from them, than it is to re-live the pain of the past. Even in the bad times, I have learned to give thanks. I wake up each morning and give thanks to GOD for what I have in my life that has meaning to me. Each day it has become my silent ritual as I get out of bed and head for the shower. I start giving thanks for all that is in my life and ask for the things I want in my life.

You may call this prayer or meditation but the important part is the expression of the gratitude for what I have or what I want. Elizabeth Gilbert writes in her book titled *Eat Pray Love*: "Prayer is a relationship; half the job is mine. If I want transformation, but can't even be bothered to articulate what exactly I'm aiming for, how will it occur? Half the benefit of prayer is in the asking itself, in the offering of a clearly posed and well-considered intention. If you don't have this, all your pleas and desires are boneless, floppy, inert; they swirl at your feet in a cold fog and never lift. So now I take the time every morning to



search myself for specificity about what I am truly asking for. *Destiny, I feel, is also a relationship, a play between divine grace and willful self-effort. Half of it you have no control over; half of it is absolutely in your hands, and your actions will show measurable consequence. Man is neither entirely a puppet of the gods, nor is he entirely captain of his own destiny; he's a little of both.*"

It is only easy to be thankful if you have faith and an understanding that nothing in life happens by accident. There is meaning and understanding that we should gain from the things that happen in our lives. In C-4, Dr. Steve Smith from Bozeman, Montana presented a lecture entitled "Serendipity." Steve's point was that nothing in life happens by accident; there is a reason for everything. I still think of Steve to this day for having the courage to present this material in a manner that showed the person that he is.

Life is like a puzzle. We sometimes get a piece here and there, and pretty soon we can see the picture of our lives being revealed to us in an image only we can understand. I have been fortunate to have found many pieces to my puzzle at the Institute. I believe that we create our reality and circumstances by the choices that we make, and these choices are fueled by our thoughts and beliefs. These thoughts are carried in the universe so the universe can create the reality we wish to experience based

upon what we think. What we think determines who we are. We attract who we are into our lives.

Dr. Pankey got it right in his Cross of Dentistry, both Irwin Becker and Steve Ratcliff have pointed out in the center of each cross is HAPPINESS. Happiness is my goal in life, and it is what we as humans desire from life.

Dr. Robert Holden of The Happiness Project in England has a Ph.D in Happiness. His Institute studies and coaches people on being happy. Dr. Holden states, "What I found is that basically we have beliefs about life, and our perception gathers evidence to prove that our beliefs are right. So an optimist believes that good things can come from bad situations, while the pessimist see the exact opposite from the same situation." Our life's pursuit should be to attain happiness.

In the above diagram, I propose a Cross of Self-discovery modeled after Dr. Pankey's Cross of Dentistry and Aristotle's Cross of Life. It, too, places happiness in the center. It shows the balance that exists between the thoughts and feelings we have, and the things we do for ourselves and for others. This cross serves as a model to reflect on and gain an understanding of what I feel Dr. Pankey meant by "know yourself." In this model, gratitude would be something we do for others, while forgiveness is something we do for ourselves. ■

Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others.

– Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC)