

# HELP FOR A Suffering Planet

by Harry Palmer

One of the positive effects of Avatar is that it awakens in a person a disposition to relieve the distress of fellow creatures.

Let me reconstruct a session that I ran for a man who knew nothing about Avatar. It is a good illustration of why CHP\* fails as an emergency assist, but Exercise 12, Releasing Fixed Attention, from the *ReSurfacing* book works.

He was happy to let me help him, but was skeptical. His right knee hurt so badly that he couldn't sleep, yet his doctor could find no obvious fault with the knee. Exploratory surgery had been suggested. I suspected, rightly as it turned out, that it was a persistent mass.

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I explained that I was going to have him focus attention on the knee and then on something else and that we were going to go back and forth at least ten times or until he felt some relief. I asked permission to take research notes for an article and assured him that his name wouldn't be used. He agreed.

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We settle into lounge chairs on a screened porch for the session. We start with attention on the knee. He moves it around a little, grimaces and says, "That's it. It hurts that way most of the time. Especially at night. Sort of a shooting pain that starts here," pointing at the inside of the knee, "and goes down the leg. Sometimes I can feel it all the way to the

ankle, and it makes my right foot ache. It's hard to describe."

"Okay," I say and point at the bird feeder in the yard. "Look at that." One squirrel has climbed into the bird feeder and is throwing out sunflower seeds to a squirrel on the ground.

"She looks pregnant," he says. "I wonder if that's her mate in the feeder." And then after another minute of watching, he says, "It's sure easier than gathering acorns."

"How's the knee?"

"Oh, it hurts like always." He takes a few seconds to focus on the knee and moves it several times. "If I move it just right, it hurts." He tries to show me. Almost immediately he has his first realization. "Funny thing is, it's not always the same movement that causes it to hurt."

"That's interesting," I say, and he has another realization.

"Yes, it seems like it is caused by something other than movement. Movement just seems to aggravate it."

"Can you describe what that something is?"

Several minutes pass before he answers.

"Boy, I just don't know."

I figure it's time to draw his attention out. "Where did the squirrels go?" I ask.

He opens his eyes. "I don't know. I guess maybe they saw a hawk."

"Do the hawks bother them?"

"No, I think they're just being cautious. Mostly the hawk eats lizards. There's one hawk that comes sometimes and sits on the bird bath. I've actually seen the squirrels chase him away. I guess if he found a young squirrel, and found him alone, he'd probably be dinner."

"How's the knee doing?"

"Oh, it hurts. You know what's funny?"

"What?"

"It hurts worse when I try to take my attention off of it than it does when I put my atten-

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\*CHP: Creation Handling Procedure, an advanced exercise from *The Avatar*  
Materials that deliberately parallels the operation of awareness in the universe.

tion on it." He rubs his knee thoughtfully. "I guess it wants attention and doesn't like it when it doesn't get it." He closes his eyes and seems to drift off.

"What are you thinking about?"

"Oh, just thinking about how kids sometimes hurt themselves to get attention. I was wondering if that's why my knee hurts."

"How does it feel?"

"Oh, it still hurts. It depresses me."

"How so?"

"Oh, it just makes me feel bad. I can't find a reason for it, and nothing seems to work. I just feel...helpless. I feel like some old beggar on a crutch. I hate it. I really hate it. I try not to let it get me down, but I really hate it." His voice is getting shaky. "Sometimes I think it must be some kind of punishment." His face is contorted behind his hands. He tries to hide that he is crying. "Sorry." He shakes it off. "I can't go on with this. It's not going anywhere."

"Feels like there's some strong emotions connected with that knee. How would you describe them?"

"Oh God. I just can't. It hurts so much. It's bigger than me. There's nothing I can do about it. I've tried. I've really tried. It has brought me to my knees." His mood suddenly shifts. "That's funny. It's brought me to my knees." He's laughing and crying at the same time. I wait for the emotion to work itself out.

Finally, looking back at the bird feeder, I ask, "Do you ever see any cardinals?"

"Oh, yes. There's a whole family that comes around 4 o'clock. It's still a little too early for them. There's also a little brown bird that has a top knot on its head like a cardinal. I don't know the name. They're real tame. Sometimes they sit on the window sill."

"How's the knee doing?"

"You know, it's better. It feels like it had a workout. I think it was the idea of being brought to my knees that made it feel better. I think I really fight the idea of being brought

to my knees. I don't know who it was, maybe my dad, use to say, 'Get off your knees.'"

As if on cue, a bright red cardinal appears at the bird feeder. "There he is. You can tell by his color, he's a male. The females are more washed out."

We both watch the cardinal for a minute.

"What's the knee doing?" I ask.

"Not much. It actually feels pretty good right now. But it does go away sometimes and then comes back."

"When did it do that?"

"I don't remember. I really only think about it when it's hurting. If I've had a real hard day, it hurts all night. But then some nights—not many—I don't notice it at all. It reminds me of farmers that were suppose to predict the weather by the pain in their joints." He drifts off again.

"What are you thinking?"

"My grandfather had a big outdoor thermometer and just for the hell of it, I threw a stone at it, and it smashed all to pieces. Little shards of glass everywhere. Sometime my knee joint feels like it's filled with those shards of glass."

"What did your grandfather do?"

"I don't think he did anything, but I remember being real scared that he might."

"There's the little brown bird," I say pointing.

"That's him. See how he's got a thing on his head? He moves differently though, a lot quicker than the cardinals."

We watch for awhile, and then his attention drifts back to his knee. "There's still something there," he says.

"What's it feel like?"

"Well, it feels like I got shot in the knee. I imagine this picture of a civil war soldier charging across a field and getting hit in the knee. Boy, with one of those old musket balls that must have really hurt. That would get your attention. Maybe my knee still hurts

***The truth that an Avatar Master teaches does not require a name, for it does not pass through the world, but is the loving model of willingness to share consciousness.***

from a past life or something. Do you believe in that?"

"Yes, sometimes."

"I'll tell you, if you got hit in the knee with one of them musket balls, it would hurt bad enough that you wouldn't ever forget it." He's examining his knee. "Look at that. There's a red patch right here just the size of bullet. Or a tooth."

"A tooth?"

"Yeah, I was just imagining why my knee might hurt, and I thought about how much it hurts when something bites you and a tooth strikes bone. That makes my knee hurt just to think about it. Makes me want to get away. That's the fear again. Do you think pain and fear always go together?"

"I don't know."

"I think they do. That's that something that I couldn't see before. It's something scary. Boy, I can feel it. Look." He shows me he has given himself goose bumps on the arm.

"How's the knee?"

"So far so good. This really tires you out, doesn't it? I feel ready for a nap."

"Is the tired feeling coming from your knee?"

"I don't know."

"What's it feel like?"

"It feels like I just want to lay here and not move." He's slumped down in the lounge and is lying completely motionless. His eyes are open.

"What are you thinking?"

"I picture myself on that civil war battle-field again. And I'm just laying there—wait, that's not quite right. I'm laying outside a field hospital, and they've cut my leg off. They've cut my damn leg off! Oh, Jesus, help me. I just want to go to sleep. I don't want to think about anything. I just want to sleep. This is a very familiar feeling."

After a couple of minutes of silence, he thinks of something and starts laughing and shaking his head. "You want to know what I told the doctor the other day? I said if he couldn't do anything for the knee, he ought to saw the leg off."

"That is funny." We laugh together.

"You know what this is?" he asks pointing at the knee. And then answers his own question. "Have you ever heard of a phantom-limb pain?"

"What's that?"

"It's when an amputee has a pain in a limb that isn't there anymore. Like he can still feel his hand, but his whole arm is gone. He's remembering. That's what this is like. It's a phantom knee pain."

We sit quietly while the idea sinks in. It feels like something has changed.

"Well," he says, "I said I was never going to forget it and I didn't. You know, I feel fantastic. What did you do to me?"

"Look, the squirrels are back."

*(A follow-up a week later confirmed the knee was continuing to improve, and there was a strong interest in doing Avatar)*