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# Kima Photographs the Soul

*CHARLES VAN RIPER*

Dr. T., the head of the department of psychopathology spoke to me curtly. "As of this instant, I'm relieving you of all your duties. Shackson will take care of your left handed rats. Charley Hazzard will finish building that amplifier and Hilden can measure the rest of those achilles tendon reaction times." My face fell. Hard. It was the postdepression year, 1932, and my fifty dollar a month research assistantship was all that three of us had to live on while we struggled to complete our doctorates in psychology. Fifty dollars and the unearned increment of carrots, lettuce and an occasional steak which I occasionally smuggled from the hospital icebox where I procured the milk for my experimental animals. I was wondering which cook had betrayed me when the doctor smiled. "No, you're not being fired. I just have another assignment for you—an important one. I want you to photograph the soul." He grinned, evilly.

As we walked back to his laboratory in the university psychopathic hospital, he explained. A famous Hindu savant named Kima had heard of our pioneering researches with brain waves and action currents. He had made the long pilgrimage to our university because he was convinced that these might reveal the soul in action. "I tried to tell him that these waves of electrical potential that sweep across the cortex of the brain or accompany muscular effort are physiological not spiritual processes," said the Head, "but he won't listen. When I showed him some of our photographs of action currents the beggar started talking nonsense about the soul or something. I've been instructed by the president of the university to show this man every courtesy, so he's all yours, son. You'll find him in the next office. Photograph his bloody soul but keep him out of my hair!"

I spent most of my waking hours for three months with Kima. They were good months for Kima was not only wise but very intelligent. The little dark man with the serene face studied fiercely, mastered every shred of information about these brain waves and action currents, and insisted that I do likewise so that he could discuss them with me. And then, when he found I could not understand his all consuming hunger to find the spirit or soul, he began to teach me a bit of the strange wisdom of the East. When he requested that I learn to meditate for hours, I tried, but I never mastered even the first of his seven postures. My knees creaked and my legs went to sleep and my thoughts kept shifting from Karma to a girl called Katie. I was relieved when finally Kima evolved an experimental design.

As I recall, it went like this. The soul was active when one was alert and attentive or imagining. But to get at its essence, all muscular activity must cease for it masked the soul's action. When I protested that, if this was so, the only way we could get a picture of the pure soul was to kill the subject, Kima agreed. I then suggested that he ask the Head to be our first experimental animal. As always, Kima made me ashamed of my levity. He patiently explained that of course we could not kill our experimental subjects, logical as such a procedure would seem, but that perhaps by reducing the amount of muscular activity we might discern, though dimly, the soul's essential features. It would only be necessary to have our subjects thoroughly quiescent.

So I built his apparatus. It consisted of a padded chair with arms. On one arm rested a narrow carriage built of wood into which the subject's arm was inserted. This was attached near the back of the chair so that it could be swung up and down, in a vertical arc. By means of a motor and a rope working over some pulleys, the arm carriage could be lifted without the subject's effort. Electrodes were to be placed over the critical spots on the subject's lifting muscles so that any tiny action currents in those muscles could be detected and photographed on our oscilloscope. The night before we began the experiment, I went over to the lab and painted the whole thing with pure white enamel. Somehow, the bare wood and screws seemed hardly fit for soul catching. I also attached a small temple gong Kima had given me to the top of the contraption so that when the arm carriage pointed straight up, it would clang. Kima smiled when he saw it. He said that it was my reverence, not my irreverence which had compelled me to make the changes.

Our laboratory was in the basement of the psychopathic hospital, directly under the ward where they kept those female patients who were highly disturbed. It was not a particularly quiet place except at meal time, so it was noon when we gave the experiment its first dry run. The procedure was as follows. After the subject was placed in

the padded chair with his right arm in the carriage and the wires attached to the muscles, the subject was first to lift that arm in its carriage slowly to the vertical or gong position. Next he was to let the arm remain passive as the motor lifted the arm till the gong sounded. Then, he was merely to imagine that the arm was being lifted; and finally, he was to imagine that he was lifting the arm. Then we would repeat the four steps in the reverse order. It was Kima's hope that the third and fourth steps or conditions would be the ones which would reveal the essential features of the soul in action for these were the ones where attentive imagination alone would be present.

I had expected that Kima would desire to be the subject but he was very firm in his refusal. "I have searched for this for forty years," he said. "I am close to my dream but it is not for me to see my own soul." So saying, he went into one of his trance-like states of meditation and I went out for a hamburger. When I returned, he hooked me up in the chair and started the cameras whirring. I raised my arm; I had my arm raised; I imagined both. I did them again in reversed order. Then Kima disengaged the camera and despite my scepticism, I felt a curious flare of excitement as we entered the dark room to develop the films.

All eight shots looked alike! Those taken when I was imagining showed action currents not as large in amplitude but that was the only difference. There was no profile of a soul. I made some small sad joke about having lost my soul to Satan last Homecoming night, and suggested that we try it on the Head's secretary who I was sure had as beautiful a soul as she had legs. I also proposed that we put her leg in the carriage instead of her arm but was vetoed by both Kima and the lady. Again the films showed a result similar to my own. I regarded the secretary with renewed interest. Perhaps she didn't have a soul either. Kima was neither amused nor discouraged. "We should not expect to see the soul so easily," he said. "I must meditate upon this thing."

The next day, his face was alight. "I now know why we failed," said he. "It is because you Americans are never still, are never quiet. What we have found on these films is your constant tension. It has masked the features of the soul. I must teach you to be quiet so that your souls can be seen. When you have learned how to be at peace within your skin, we shall make a new recording." I felt ashamed.

So with five others, including the girl with the beautiful legs, I was chosen to learn Kima's method of relaxation. He said it was a variant of Yoga. He said he practiced it every day of his life and that was why his face had no wrinkles on it—which was true. He told me he was of fifty-four years but he had the face of a ten year old. There in the dusty basement laboratory, Kima trained us in Yoga relaxation. First, he sat the six of us in chairs with our right arms resting on the

table. Then he told us to roll our eyeballs upward and backward—"the position of death and peace." Then, while maintaining this, to close our eyelids over the eyeballs and to exhale just a bit further than usual, then to end the exhalation with a tiny silent sigh. Over and over again he trained us until we could follow the sequence at will. Finally he was satisfied with our performance.

"Now," said Kima, "I will divulge to you the heart secret of relaxation. The eyeballs backward, the long breathe out, these are essential, but there is this also: You must come to see life as a whole. In my Yoga, the whole is the circle. In my body the circle is my navel. You must then also see life as a whole. Meditate upon your navel."

Not a damned one of us ever learned to relax the Yoga way. Every time we thought of our navels our eyeballs went down. Kima went back to India. Sometimes I ring the gong for him.

## The Mushroom Cloud

One day while walking up the stairs,  
By chance I sighted Bart.  
With stethoscope in hand and ears  
He listened to his heart.

"What kind of music can it be  
That holds you so attentively  
To this constancy of throbs?"

"You see," said he  
Impatiently,  
"I must know if it stops."

*H. DON PHILLIPS*