

Four Subhitti Koans

First koan -

A student asked Subhiti, "Is it not true that science has declared that mammals are warm-blooded, and suckle their young?"

"Science has so declared," agreed the Subhiti.

"And also," continued the student, "has science not declared that reptiles and birds lay eggs?"

"Yes," agreed Subhiti.

"Then what of the platypus?" asked the student. "It is neither mammal nor reptile nor bird. It is a freak of nature. What kind of gods could have created such a defective animal?"

"What of the scientist?" asked Subhiti. "He declares Mammals to be Real, and he declares Reptiles to be Real, and he declares Birds to be Real, yet he finds difficulty with the Platypus. I have never seen a mammal, I have never seen a reptile, I have never seen a bird. But I have seen a badger, I have seen a gecko, I have seen a cockatiel. I have also seen a platypus.

"What kind of gods could have created such a science?"

Second koan –

In his age, Subhiti once stood at the top of the spine of the worlds.

In a silk bag he carried every word that had ever been spoken.

A rich disciple climbed to the top of the spine of the world with much difficulty. Subhiti offered him some tea, and when the disciple had recovered, he asked Subhiti for Enlightenment.

Subhiti said, "You have worked hard, and I shall give to you the greatest treasure you will ever receive." He then held up the silk bag, saying, "Do you see this bag?"

"Yes, Master," said the eager disciple.

"You cannot have it," answered the generous Subhiti.

Third koan –

Subhiti once sat on the porch behind his little house. He closed his eyes on the world and counted his breathing and tried to empty his mind. After he had sat in this way for many days, a disciple came to him.

"Subhiti," asked the disciple, "what are you doing here on your porch for so long?"

Subhiti thought for many hours before answering, "I am meditating." Subhiti then thought for many more hours and became sad. "No," he said, "I am not meditating. I am only sitting."

In a later time Subhiti climbed the Black Mountains to the roof of the world.

Having become weary, he sat at the edge of the roof of the world and rested. From here, he could see forever. He sat like this for twenty-seven years.

After the twenty-seven years were almost past, a disciple climbed to the edge of the roof of the world and discovered Subhiti sitting there. "Master," the disciple said, "what are you doing here on the edge of the roof of the world?"

"I am sitting," answered Subhiti.

Fourth koan –

"Have you heard the story Buddha told about the man who dreamed he was a butterfly?" asked the disciple. "When he awoke, he asked himself, 'Am I a man who dreamed I was a butterfly, or am I a butterfly dreaming that I am a man?'"

"I have heard a story much like this," answered the sage, "but it was told to me by a butterfly."

