1 Sutta summary and highlights

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

1.1.1 The Kūṭāgāra Sutta (S 56.44) is a short discourse stating that we must “break through”\(^1\) with full understanding into the 4 noble truths if we are to make “a total end of suffering” [§1]. Just as it is impossible to build the upper floors of a pinnacled house (kūṭāgāra) before the ground floor is built, so, too, without a breaking through into the truths, it is impossible for us to be fully freed from suffering, that is, to fully awaken [§§2-3].\(^2\)

1.1.2 Conversely, with breakthrough into the 4 noble truths, it is possible to make “a total end of suffering” [§4]. This is like when we build a pinnacled house by first building the ground floor, and then each floor progressively [§§5-6]. This is also an allusion to the gradual training, that is, the 3 trainings in moral virtue, mental concentration and wisdom.\(^3\)

1.2 RELATED SUTTAS

1.2.1 Just like in the Papāṭa Sutta (S 56.42) and the Pariḷāha Sutta (S 56.43), the Kūṭāgāra Sutta, too, closes with the Buddha exhorting us to devote ourselves to reflecting on the 4 noble truths [§7]. The Kūṭāgāra Sutta is the shortest of these three related Suttas:

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1.2.2 Like the Papāṭa Sutta (S 56.42) and the Parilāha Sutta (S 56.43), the Kūṭāgāra Sutta, too, is a “mirrored sutta.” It is divided into two almost exact halves of contiguous teachings on the same theme—in this case, the dire consequences of ignorance of the 4 noble truths. One half (usually the first half, giving the negative version), and the other half (usually the closing) the positive version. The negative presentation is an apophasis or a disclaiming intention, while the positive presentation is a kataphasis or an affirming intention.\(^4\)

\(^1\) On “breaking through,” see SD 53.15 (4.2.1).
\(^2\) On the Sutta’s location in Sacca Saṁyutta, see SD 53.25
\(^3\) On the 3 trainings, see (Ti) Sikkhā S (A 3.88); SD 24.10c; Sīla samādhi paññā, SD 21.6; SD 1.11 (5).
\(^4\) See SD 53.15 (1.1.2).
Kūṭāgāra Sutta
The Discourse on the Pinnacled House
S 56.44

When ending of suffering is impossible

1 “Bhikshus, if one were to speak thus:5
‘Without having broken through into the noble truth that is suffering, the noble truth that is the arising of suffering, the noble truth that is the ending of suffering, the noble truth that is the path to the ending of suffering,
I will make a total end of suffering!’—this is impossible.

2 Suppose, bhikshus, one were to say thus:
‘Without building the ground-floor of a pinnacled house, I will build the upper floors!’—this is impossible.

3 Even so, bhikshus, if one were to say thus:
‘Without having broken through into the noble truth that is suffering, the noble truth that is the arising of suffering, the noble truth that is the ending of suffering, the noble truth that is the path to the ending of suffering,
I will make a total end of suffering!’—this is impossible.

When ending of suffering is possible

4 “Bhikshus, if one were to speak thus:
‘Having broken through into the noble truth that is suffering, the noble truth that is the arising of suffering, the noble truth that is the ending of suffering, the noble truth that is the path to the ending of suffering,
I will make a total end of suffering!’—this is possible.

5 Suppose, bhikshus, one were to say thus:
‘Having built the ground-floor of a pinnacled house, I will build the upper floors!’—this is possible.

6 Even so, bhikshus, if one were to say thus:
‘Having broken through into the noble truth that is suffering, the noble truth that is the arising of suffering, the noble truth that is the ending of suffering, the noble truth that is the path to the ending of suffering,
I will make a total end of suffering!’—this is possible. [453]

5 For a detailed analysis of the 4 truths, see SD 53.15 (4).
6 “Without having broken through” (anabhisamecca): see SD 53.15 (4.2.1).
7 Dukkhaṁ ariya, saccam yathā, bhūtaṁ anabhisamecca.
EXHORTATION

7 Therefore, bhikshus, you should devote yourself (to reflecting) thus: ‘This is suffering.’
    You should devote yourself (to reflecting) thus: ‘This is the arising of suffering.’
    You should devote yourself (to reflecting) thus: ‘This is the ending of suffering.’
    You should devote yourself (to reflecting) thus: ‘This is the path leading to the ending of suffering.’

— evam —

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