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## (Sacca) Kūṭāgāra Sutta

The (Truth) Discourse on the Pinnacled House | S 56.44

Theme: Only after penetrating the 4 truths can we fully overcome suffering

Translated by Piya Tan ©2018

### 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**”<sup>1</sup> 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].<sup>2</sup>

**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.<sup>3</sup>

#### 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:

<b>Papāṭa Sutta</b>	S 56.42	Ignorance of the 4 truths is more perilous than a great precipice	SD 53.15
<b>Pariḷāha Sutta</b>	S 56.43	Ignorance of the 4 truths burns more painfully than hell-fire	SD 53.16
<b>(Sacca) Kūṭāgāra Sutta</b>	S 56.44	The primacy of the 4 noble truths	SD 53.17

**1.2.2** Like **the Papāṭa Sutta** (S 56.42) and **the Pariḷāha 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.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On “breaking through,” see SD 53.15 (4.2.1).

<sup>2</sup> On the Sutta’s location in **Sacca Saṃyutta**, see SD 53.25

<sup>3</sup> On the 3 trainings, see **(Ti) Sikkhā S** (A 3.88), SD 24.10c; **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6; SD 1.11 (5).

<sup>4</sup> 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:<sup>5</sup>  
 ‘Without having broken through<sup>6</sup> into **the noble truth that is suffering,**<sup>7</sup>  
*without having broken through into* **the noble truth that is the arising of suffering,**  
*without having broken through into* **the noble truth that is the ending of suffering,**  
*without having broken through into* **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,**  
*without having broken through into* **the noble truth that is the arising of suffering,**  
*without having broken through into* **the noble truth that is the ending of suffering,**  
*without having broken through into* **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,**  
*having broken through into* **the noble truth that is the arising of suffering,**  
*having broken through into* **the noble truth that is the ending of suffering,**  
*having broken through into* **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,**  
*having broken through into* **the noble truth that is the arising of suffering,**  
*having broken through into* **the noble truth that is the ending of suffering,**  
*having broken through into* **the noble truth that is the path to the ending of suffering,**  
 I will make a total end of suffering!’—this is possible. [453]

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed analysis of the 4 truths, see SD 53.15 (4).

<sup>6</sup> “Without having broken through” (*anabhisamecca*): see SD 53.15 (4.2.1).

<sup>7</sup> *Dukkhaṃ ariya, saccaṃ yathā, bhūtaṃ anabhisamecca.*

EXHORTATION

7	Therefore, bhikshus,	
	you should devote yourself (to reflecting) thus:	<b>'This is <u>suffering</u>.'</b>
	<i>You should devote yourself (to reflecting) thus:</i>	<b>'This is the <u>arising</u> of suffering.'</b>
	<i>You should devote yourself (to reflecting) thus:</i>	<b>'This is the <u>ending</u> of suffering.'</b>
	<i>You should devote yourself (to reflecting) thus:</i>	<b>'This is <u>the path</u> leading to the ending of suffering.'</b>

— evaṃ —

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