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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

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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:

Papāṭa Sutta	S 56.42	Ignorance of the 4 truths is more perilous than a great precipice	SD 53.15
Pariḷāha Sutta	S 56.43	Ignorance of the 4 truths burns more painfully than hell-fire	SD 53.16
(Sacca) Kūṭāgāra Sutta	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.⁴

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¹ On “breaking through,” see SD 53.15 (4.2.1).

² On the Sutta’s location in **Sacca Saṃyutta**, 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 through⁶ into **the noble truth that is suffering,**⁷
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]

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 *Dukkhaṃ ariya, saccaṃ yathā, bhūtaṃ anabhisamecca.*

EXHORTATION

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

— evaṃ —

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