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Paṭhama Koṭiḡāma Sutta

The 1st Koṭiḡāma Discourse; Ee¹ **Paṭhama Vajjī Sutta** the 1st Discourse on Knowledge | S 56.21

Theme: Ignorance of the 4 truths keeps us in samsara

Translated by Piya Tan ©2018

1 Sutta summary and significance

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY AND OCCURRENCE

1.1.1 The Koṭiḡāma Suttas (S 56.21+22)

1.1.1.1 The Paṭhama Koṭiḡāma Sutta (S 56.21), the 1st Koṭiḡāma Discourse, states that it is because we have not penetrated the 4 noble truths—not fully understood the true reality about life—that we are caught in this endless cycle of rebirths and redeaths (*samsāra*). This Sutta recurs in **the Vinaya** and forms part of **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16)—which are chronologically later than S 56.21. It is also quoted in **the Netti-p,pakaraṇa** [1.1.2].

1.1.1.2 This Sutta is very similar to **the Dutiya Koṭiḡāma Sutta** (S 56.22), the 2nd Koṭiḡāma Sutta, which words the same message in a slightly different way. Both also close with a set of different verses: with 2 verses and with 5 verses respectively. The Dutiya Koṭiḡāma Sutta does not seem to have any parallels, except for its closing verses, which recur in **the Samaṇa,brāhmaṇa Sutta** (It 4.4) and **the Dva-yatānupassanā Sutta** (Sn 3.23/724-727).

1.1.2 The Paṭhama Koṭiḡāma Sutta (S 56.21) forms part of the composite **Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16)² and **the Vinaya** (Mv 6.29).³ Both these Suttas form the narrative of the Buddha’s last journey. The narrative is, however, more detailed in the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta.

The Netti-p,pakaraṇa quotes S 56.21 in full, giving the Sutta teaching as an example of “what is to be known” or “knowable” (*ñeyya*) (Nett 868/166).

1.2 THE KOṬIḡĀMA VAGGA

1.2.1 Sacca Saṃyutta. The Koṭiḡāma Vagga is the 3rd chapter in the Sacca Saṃyutta,⁴ “the connected teachings on the truths,” that is, on the 4 noble truths, and is close to the ending of the whole Saṃyutta Nikāya. The Vagga (chapter) is named after the first two suttas, which are in turn given at Koṭiḡāma, where the Buddha stopped during his last journey. There the Buddha addresses the Vajjīs on the essence of the 4 truths.⁵

¹ Corrected from *vijjā* for both **Koṭiḡāma Ss 1+2**.

² D 16,2.1/2:90 f (SD 9).

³ Mv 6.29 @ V 1:230,23-231,10.

⁴ For Dhamma,cakka-p,pavattana Vagga, the 1st chapter of **Sacca Saṃyutta** (S 56), see SD 53.25 (2).

⁵ See **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,2.1-3), SD 9. It is likely that short suttas like these were compiled together to form the composite Mahā,parinibbāna S. See SD 9 (1.3).

1.2.2 The Koṭigāma Chapter

1.2.2.1 The breakthrough into the 4 noble truths is the true beginning of the path of awakening. For, this is when we become **streamwinners**, the first stage of the path.⁶ Before this, we are all “outsiders” (*bāhiraka*), those who are not yet on the path.⁷ Those who are streamwinners, once-returners, non-returners and arhats-to-be are said to be “learners” (*sekha*).⁸ Only the arhat is said to be a non-learner (*asekha*) since he has fully awakened and attained nirvana.⁹

1.2.2.2 The Koṭigāma Vagga (S 56.21-30) contains 10 suttas dealing with the 4 noble truths, which, as in the rest of the Sacca Saṃyutta (S 56),¹⁰ to which it belongs, describes the truths in various ways.

We are bound to suffer the cycles of rebirths and redeaths on account of not understanding the 4 noble truths. When we have penetrated these truths, we free ourselves from suffering and attain nirvana, the unconditioned. (**S 56.21+22**)

The Buddha is called the “fully self-awakened” (*sammā,sambuddha*) because he has awakened to these truths (**S 56.23**). In fact, all the buddhas of the past, the present and the future become fully awakened by the very same truths (**S 56.24**).

The buddhas are all arhats, too, and like all arhats—including those who are not buddhas—they are all liberated in the same way, by the same truths (**S 56.25**).¹¹ Hence, we are exhorted to reflect on these truths, and to inspire our near and dear ones in them, too (**S 56.26**).

The 4 truths are described as **noble** (*ariya*) because they are “real, not unreal, invariable” (**S 56.27**). They are taught in this world by the most “**noble**” of beings, the most highly evolved, the Buddha—hence, they are called the noble truths (**S 56.28**).

These 4 truths are to be fully known in terms of those to be understood (the 1st truth), to be abandoned (the 2nd truth), to be realized (the 3rd truth) and to be cultivated (the 4th truth) (**S 56.29**). And yet, when we have penetrated any one of these truths, we also understand the other three (**S 56.30**).

1.2.2.3 Here is a list of the Suttas of the Koṭigāma Vagga that have been translated here in SD 53:

S 5.12.3.1	(S 56.21)	Paṭṭhama Koṭigāma Sutta	Ignorance of the 4 truths keeps us in samsara	SD 53.34
S 5.12.3.2	(S 56.22)	Dutiya Koṭigāma Sutta	The 4 truths are the true goal of the spiritual life	SD 53.35
S 5.12.3.3	(S 56.23)	Sammā Sambuddha Sutta	Arhats have direct knowledge of the 4 truths	SD 53.36
S 5.12.3.4	(S 56.24)	(Koṭigāma) Arahanta Sutta	All buddhas awaken on account of the 4 truths	SD 53.37
S 5.12.3.5	(S 56.25)	Āsava-k,khaya Sutta	The 4 truths destroy the influxes	SD 53.38
S 5.12.3.6	(S 56.26)	(Koṭigāma) Mitta Sutta	The 4 truths should be taught to our near and dear ones	SD 53.39
S 5.12.3.7	(S 56.27)	Tatha Sutta 2	Why the noble truths are so called	SD 53.33b

⁶ The 4 kinds of the saints are the streamwinner (*sotāpanna*), once-returner (*sakadāgāmi*), non-returner (*anāgāmi*) and the arhat (*arahata*): see SD 10.16 (11-14).

⁷ SD 10.16 (1.2.3.2); SD 51.17 (3.4.2.3).

⁸ On the learner (*sekha* or *sekkha*), see **Sekha S** (M 53), SD 21.14; (**Sekha**) **Uddesa S** (A 3.85), SD 3.3(2).

⁹ That they have nothing more to do, see **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9,56.2/1:203) n, SD 7.14; SD 15.10a (1.1.1).

¹⁰ On **Sacca Saṃyutta** (S 56), see SD 53.25 (2).

¹¹ See esp **Sambuddha S** (S 22.58), SD 49.10.

S 5.12.3.8	(S 56.28)	(Koti,gāma) Loka Sutta	The meaning of “noble” (<i>ariya</i>)	SD 104.5
S 5.12.3.9	(S 56.29)	Pariññeyya Sutta	The 4 truths should be fully mastered	SD 53.40
S 5.12.3.10	(S 56.30)	Gavampati Sutta	Understanding one of the 4 truths, we understand all of them	SD 53.1

2 Bhava,netti

2.1 The term *bhava,netti* literally means “what leads to existence,” translated here as “birth-leader.”¹² The Commentaries gloss it as “the rope of existence” (*bhava,rajju*), that is, beings, like roped cattle, are led through existence.¹³ It is a synonym for craving for existence (*bhava,taṇhā*), and occurs mostly in the verses.¹⁴

In the Buddha Hybrid Sanskrit texts, we have *loka,nāyini*, “that which leads the world,” as an epithet of *ṛṣṇā*, “craving” (Uv 29.53).

SD 53.34(2)

Bhava,netti Sutta

The Discourse on the Birth-leader • S 23.3/3:190 f
Theme: That which leads us into samsara

1 Originating in Sāvattihī.

2 Seated at one side, the venerable Rādha said to the Blessed One:

“Birth-leader! Birth-leader, bhante, it is said. What, bhante, is a **birth-leader** (*bhava,netti*); what is **the ending of the birth-leader** (*bhava.netti,nirodha*)?”¹⁵ [191]

3 (1) “Rādha, the desire, lust, delight, craving, the attachment and clinging, the mental standpoints, inclinations [mindsets] and latent tendencies¹⁶ for **form**—this is called the birth-leader.¹⁷

Their cessation is the cessation of the birth-leader.¹⁸

4 (2) Rādha, the desire, lust, delight, craving, the mental standpoints, inclinations [mindsets] and latent tendencies for **feeling**—this is called the birth-leader.

Their cessation is the cessation of the birth-leader.

5 (3) Rādha, the desire, lust, delight, craving, the mental standpoints, inclinations [mindsets] and latent tendencies for **perception**—this is called the birth-leader.

Their cessation is the cessation of the birth-leader.

6 (4) Rādha, the desire, lust, delight, craving, the mental standpoints, inclinations [mindsets] and latent tendencies for **formations**—this is called the birth-leader.

¹² See Tha:N 152 n135.

¹³ MA 3:342 f (on M 2:105); SA 2:336; AA 3:1; UA 272; NmA 1:39; DhsA 364.

¹⁴ Verses: D 2:91; M 2:105; S 3:194, 5:432×2; Tha 135d; 881d; 604d = 656d = 687d = 792d = 891d = 918d = 1015d = 1194d.

¹⁵ *Bhava,netti, bhava,netti'ti* bhante, vuccati. [*Ce Ee Ke Se; Be: bhava.netti,nirodho bhava.netti,nirodho'ti.] Kātamā nu kho, bhante, bhava,netti, katamo bhava.netti,nirodho'ti? On bhava,netti, see (2).*

¹⁶ “the attachment and clinging, ... and latent tendencies” (*upay'upādānā cetaso adhiṭṭhānābhinivesānusayā*). Comy: Craving and views are called “mental standpoint” (*cetaso adhiṭṭhana*) because they are the foundation for the (unwholesome) mind, and “the latent tendency of mindset (and inclination),” or perhaps “the latent tendency that is mindset and inclination” (*abhinivesānusaya*) because they stay in the mind and lie latent there (SA 2:33). See **Kaccāna,gotta S** (S 12.15,6/2:17), SD 6.13; see foll n.

¹⁷ *Rūpe kho rādha yo chando yo rāgo yā nandī yā taṇhā ye upay'upādānā cetaso adhiṭṭhānābhinivesānusayā, ayam vuccati bhava,netti.* For a similar passage on the 5 aggregates, see **Haliddakani S 1** (S 22.3,8-15) SD 10.12.

¹⁸ *Tesam nirodhā* [only Be: *nirodho*] *bhava.netti,nirodho*.

Their cessation is the cessation of the birth-leader.

7 (5) *Rādhā*, the desire, lust, delight, craving, the mental standpoints, inclinations [mindsets] and latent tendencies for **consciousness**—this is called the birth-leader.

Their cessation is the cessation of the birth-leader.

— evaṃ —

Paṭhama Koṭigāma Sutta

The 1st Koṭigāma Discourse

S 56.21

1 Thus have I heard.

At one time, the Blessed One was dwelling amongst the Vajjīs in Koṭigāma.¹⁹ There, the Blessed One addressed the monks thus:

Why we are stuck in samsara

2 “Bhikshus, on account of not understanding, not penetrating into **the 4 noble truths** that you and I have run and wandered through this long journey.²⁰

3 What are the four:

- | | |
|---|--|
| (1) Bhikshus, on account of not understanding, not penetrating into the noble truth that is that you and I have run and wandered through this long journey. ²¹ | suffering |
| (2) Bhikshus, on account of not understanding, not penetrating into the noble truth that is that you and I have run and wandered through this long journey. | the arising of suffering |
| (3) Bhikshus, on account of not understanding, not penetrating into the noble truth that is that you and I have run and wandered through this long journey. | the ending of suffering |
| (4) Bhikshus, on account of not understanding, [432] not penetrating into the noble truth that is that you and I have run and wandered through this long journey. | the path leading to the ending of suffering |

¹⁹ **Koṭigāma** (Skt Koṭi,grāmaka or Kuṭi,grāmaka), a village of the Vṛjīs [§1], located in the vicinity of Bhaddiya, nagara, about 1 *gāvuta* from the Ganges (MahvṬ 560). A *gāvuta* is a quarter *yojana*. A *yojana* is about 11.25 km (7 mi). As such, a *gāvuta* would be about 2.8 km. Buddhaghosa says that the village was so called because it was built near the dome (*koṭi* or *thūpikā*) of Mahā Panāda’s palace, said to have been located and submerged in the middle of the river (J 2:332 f; ThaA 1:287; Mahv 31.5 f).

²⁰ *Catunnaṃ bhikkhave, ariya,saccānaṃ ananubodhā appaṭivedhā evaṃ idaṃ dīgham-addhānaṃ sandhāvitaṃ saṃsaritaṃ mamañ c’eva tumhākañ ca.*

²¹ *Dukkhaṃ bhikkhave ariya,saccassa ananubodhā appaṭivedhā evaṃ idaṃ dīgham-addhānaṃ sandhāvitaṃ saṃsaritaṃ mamañ c’eva tumhākañ ca.*

The 4 noble truths

(1) That noble truth, bhikshus, that is
has been understood, penetrated.

suffering

(2) The noble truth that is
has been understood, penetrated.

the arising of suffering

(3) That noble truth, bhikshus, that is
has been understood, penetrated.

the ending of suffering

(4) The noble truth that is
has been understood, penetrated.

the path leading to the ending of suffering

Uprooted is the craving for existence! Destroyed is the birth-leader! There is no more rebirth here!²²

The Blessed One said this. Having said this, the welcome one, the teacher said this:²³

The 4-truth verses

*Catunnaṃ ariyasaccānaṃ
yathā,bhūtaṃ adassanā
saṃsaram²⁴ dīgham addhānaṃ
tāsu tāsv-eva jātisu*

Not seeing the 4 noble truths
as they really are,
long is the journey in samsara,
birth after birth.

*Tāni²⁵ etāni diṭṭhāni
bhava,netti samuhatā
ucchinnam mūlam dukkhassa
natth'idāni punabbhavōti.²⁷*

When they are seen,
the birth-leader²⁶ is slain.
Having uprooted suffering's root,
there is no more rebirth here.

— evaṃ —

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²² *Ucchinnā bhava,taṇhā. Khīṇā bhava,netti. Natth'idāni punabbhavōti.*

²³ *Idam avoca bhagavā idam vatvā sugato athâparam etad avoca satthā.*

²⁴ Be D:Ee 2:91 *saṃsitaṃ*; Ke Se saṃsaritaṃ; Ce vl *saṃsataṃ*.

²⁵ Be Ce; Ee Ke Se *yāni*.

²⁶ "Birth-guide" (*bhava.netti*): see (2).

²⁷ This verse recurs in V 1:231; **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,2.3/2:91),SD 9; Nett 166.