

Sound truth

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In **the Sotânugata Sutta** (A 4.191), SD 58.2, the “learned by ear” discourse, the Buddha teaches on how listening to the Dhamma helps us attaining the path even when we die confused. Having died with a confused mind, we are then reborn amongst the devas.

Then, the happy devas (those who know some Dhamma) teach us the Dhamma (again). Although our mindfulness is slow (weak) at that time, we quickly reach “distinction,” that is, attain at least streamwinning.

A monk teaches the devas

Or, in another scenario, we, as a Dhamma-listener, die with a confused mind, but is reborn amongst the devas. Here, a monk with psychic powers appears amongst the devas and teaches us Dhamma. Hearing this, we recall that we have heard it before. Although our mindfulness is slow (weak) at that time, we quickly reach “distinction,” that is, attain at least streamwinning.

A deva teaches to an assembly

In a third case, as a Dhamma-listener, we die with a confused mind, but is reborn amongst the devas. Here, a young deva (*devaputta*) teaches the Dhamma to an assembly of devas. Hearing this, we recall that we have heard it before. Although our mindfulness is slow (weak) at that time, we quickly reach “distinction,” that is, attain at least streamwinning.

One deva reminds another

In a fourth case, one who is spontaneously born (a deva) reminds another spontaneously born: “Do you recall, dear sir? Do you recall, dear sir, where we formerly lived the holy life?” He replies: “I recall, dear sir! I recall, dear sir!”

Although his mindfulness is slow (weak) at that time, he quickly reaches “distinction,” that is, attains at least streamwinning. This can be anyone who is happy listening to Dhamma.

The intermediate state

In explaining the Sutta, its Commentary adds an interesting detail. The Dhamma-listener who dies with a confused mind is first reborn in **an intermediate state**. According to the Burmese Commentary, memories of the Dhamma he has heard “floats” (*plavati*) before him. On account of this, he falls from the intermediate state and is reborn as a deva. Then, he hears the Dhamma again and attains distinction in one of the 4 ways mentioned above.

According to the Siamese Commentary, we are reborn into the intermediate state (since we die mentally confused). Then, recalling the Dhamma we have heard, we fall from that state and become devas. Recalling the Dhamma (again) in one of the 4 ways mentioned, we attain distinction.

Listening to the true dhamma

It should be noted here that the sutta mentions only the Buddha Dhamma, that is, the Dhamma as taught by the historical Buddha or his awakened disciples, the arhats. In modern terms, this would be the clear and simple teachings of the historical Buddha. The Buddha does not teach about any eternal Buddhas (this is against the impermanence teaching) or cosmic Bodhisattvas (this shows influence of Brahmanism or God-idea) or reciting mantras or some other “fabricated” Buddhist practices (these are often superstitious practices).

All the “second,” “third” or “fourth” turnings of the Dharma-wheel are not the Dhamma-wheel of the Buddha Dhamma. There is only **one** wheel-turning, just as we only need to discover the wheel once, and we will know how it works and benefit from it. Otherwise, dying with a confused mind, we will only fall into the subhuman states and lose touch of the Buddha Dhamma for very long durations.

Start simple

The message of the Sotâ nugata Sutta is this: We only need to **happily** listen to the Dhamma and understand what we can. It is rare that we will fully understanding everything we hear at once. Most of us will start with some **happy** understanding of Dhamma teaching that we hear. This is the seed.

Even when we die with a confused mind because of our worldly ways, when we recall the Dhamma happily, we will fall away from our suffering state and arise in a happy state where we will, upon hearing the Dhamma again, at least attain **streamwinning**.

In fact, we do not have to wait to “die with a confused mind.” Even here and now, having heard the Dhamma of the historical Buddha, we then **aspire** to attain streamwinning in this life itself. Also note that nowhere in the suttas is it stated that we need to attain jhana to become streamwinners. This is our first step on the path of awakening: we have boarded the boat that move upstream to the ancient city of Nirvana.

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