

5

Pañca Bala

The 5 spiritual powers
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1 Sarakāṇi Sutta (S 55.24/5:377)

In the following passage from **the Sarakāṇi Sutta** (S 55.24), we can see the different kinds or levels of faith (*saddhā*): as a spiritual faculty (*indriya*) and as a spiritual power (*bala*). Here “wise faith” (*avecca-p.pasāda*) is, to use Ledi Sayadaw’s term, “faith through cultivation” (*bhāvanā saddhā*), and “the faculty of faith” (*saddh’indriya*) is “ordinary faith” (*pakati saddhā*).¹

11 [(5) The truth-follower.]² Here, Mahānāma, some person does not possess wise faith³ in *the three jewels*. He is not one of joyous wisdom,⁴ nor of quick wisdom,⁵ and he has not attained liberation. However, he has these five things [the five spiritual faculties]—the faculty of faith, the faculty of effort, the faculty of mindfulness, the faculty of concentration, the faculty of wisdom.⁶ And he accepts the teachings proclaimed by the Tathāgata only after some pondering over it with wisdom.⁷

This person, too, Mahānāma, is freed from hell, the animal kingdom, the preta realm and the suffering states.

12 [(6) The faith-follower.]⁸ Here, Mahānāma, some person does not possess wise faith in the Buddha, in the Dharma and in the Sangha. He is not one of joyous wisdom, nor of quick wisdom, and he has not attained liberation. However, he has the 5 spiritual faculties. And he has just a bit of faith in the Tathāgata, just a bit of love for him.⁹

¹ See Ledi Sayadaw, *The Manuals of Buddhism*, Rangoon: Union Buddha Sāsana Council, 1965:340 f.

² “Truth-follower,” *dhammānussarī*. Although not mentioned here, this section describes the truth-follower, while the next section describes the faith-follower (*saddhā’nussarī*). They are defined in **Kīṭāgiri S** (M 70.20-21/1:479). According to **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1/3:225), these 2 types of persons have reached the plane of the “noble ones” (ie supramundane path) but have not yet realized the fruit of streamwinning, but will do so before they die. See S:B 1098 nn268-269.

³ “Wise faith,” *avecca-p.pasāda*. “Faith” is also *saddhā*. There are 2 kinds of faith (*saddhā*): (1) “rootless faith” (*amūlaka,saddhā*), baseless or irrational faith, blind faith (M 2:170); (2) “faith with a good cause” (*ākāravati,saddhā*), faith founded on seeing (M 1:320,8 401,23); also called *avecca-p.pasāda* (S 12.41.11/2:69). “Wise faith” is syn with (2). See **Āpaṇa S** (S 48.50) @ SD 10.4 (3.1.2) n.

⁴ “Of joyous wisdom,” *hāsa,pañña*, alt tr “of laughing wisdom” (from *hasa*, “laughter, mirth, joy”). “Here one with much joy [laughter], mirth, contentment and gladness perfects the virtues: this is joyous wisdom” (Pm 21.17/2:199 f). Comys mention *hasa,pañña* (joyous wisdom), *javana,pañña* (quick wisdom) [see foll n], *tikkha,pañña* (sharp wisdom, which cuts off all defilements) and *nibbedhika,pañña* (penetrating wisdom, by which one maintains dispassion toward all formations) (DA 3:391-393, 4:84-86; MA 4:84; SA 1:120-123, 2:85 f; AA 2:85; ThaA 3:106 f; NmA 1:231 f; cf PmA 3:640 on *hasa,pañña*).

⁵ “Of quick wisdom,” *javana,pañña*. This refers to one who quickly understands that the 5 aggregates are all impermanent, suffering and non-self (Pm 21.18/2:200). See prev n.

⁶ The 5 spiritual faculties, see Introd above.

⁷ *C’assa dhammā paññāya mattaso nijjhānaṃ khamanti*. I render *mattaso* here as “only...some.” See S:B 1099 n269.

⁸ “Faith-follower,” *saddhā’nussarī*. See n1 on truth-follower.

⁹ “Just a bit of faith ... just a bit of love,” *saddhā,mataṃ hoti pema,mattarṃ*. The phrase “just a bit” emphasizes the quality it qualifies. A similar statement is found in **Alagaddūpamā S** (M 22,4/1:141) & **Bhaddāli S** (M 65,27/-1:444): “Those who have just a bit of faith in me and just a bit of love for me,” (*yesarṃ mayi saddhā,mattarṃ pema,-*

This person, too, Mahānāma, is freed from hell, the animal kingdom, the preta realm and the suffering states.

13 Even these great sal trees,¹⁰ Mahānāma, if they could understand what is well spoken and what is ill spoken, I would declare them to be streamwinners, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of going over to self-awakening! (S 55.24,13/5:377), SD 3.6

2 Faculties and powers

2.1 Technical terms

In the **Indriya Saṃyutta** of the Saṃyutta Nikāya, the explanations of the faculties and the powers do not seem to differentiate them in terms of intensity. However, “[a] little reflection reveals that, in fact, this has to be the case,” suggests **Gethin**,

[The] commentarial explanations take as their ideal point of reference the transcendent (*lokuttara*) mind at the moment of path when all thirty-seven *bodhipakkhiya-dhammas* can be said to be present in a single arising of consciousness (*cittuppāda*). Thus it is precisely the same *saddhā* that is considered as both *indriya* and *bala*, not the two different arisings of *saddhā*, the first of which is weak and the second strong. Accordingly the commentaries appear to see the difference between *indriya* and *bala* essentially in terms of the former being active and the latter being passive: as an active force the *indriya* acts as a lord and overcomes or displaces its opposite force: conversely as a passive force the *bala* as a result of its strength cannot be overcome by its opposite.

(*The Buddhist Path of Awakening*, 2001:144)¹¹

In the Nikāyas, however, the term *indriya* is more technical, and “in its wider application the term *bala* is much less technical than *indriya*” (Gethin 2001:140) and as such, “[a] *bala*, then, can be any kind of power, strength or strong point” (op cit 141).

2.2 The qualities of a leader

The 5 faculties (*pañc’indriya*)¹² are traditionally said to be “the qualities of a leader” (from *inda*, Skt *indra*, meaning “leader”). However, as spiritual faculties, they are the tools for personal development.

When these spiritual faculties become “unshakable” by their opposites, they are then known as “spiritual powers” (*bala*).¹³ According to **the Pañca Bala Sutta 2** (A 5.15) the faculties are transformed into powers in this manner:

mattam). Comy explains that this refers to the insight-practitioners (*vipassaka puggalā*) who have not attained any supramundane state, not gaining even streamwinning, they are reborn in a heaven. On the other hand, we can take this passage as is, that is, anyone who has “just a bit of faith, just a bit of love” in the Buddha is reborn in a heaven, without going against the grain of early Buddhism. In simple terms, this refers to the vital role of lovingkindness (*mettā*) in daily life and meditation: SD 38.4 (7). See M:ÑB 2001:1212 n274.

¹⁰ Comy says that the Buddha was pointing to 4 sal trees nearby (*Shorea robusta*) (AA 3:288).

¹¹ See R Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, 2001:140-145.

¹² The 5 faculties (*pañc’indriya*). For a traditional exposition, see for example, Ledi Sayadaw, 1965:338-348.

¹³ The 5 powers (*pañca bala*). For a traditional exposition, see for example, Ledi Sayadaw, 1965:348-356.

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| (1) faith, | seen in the 4 qualities of the streamwinner (<i>sotāpannessa aṅgāni</i>); ¹⁴ | |
| (2) effort, | seen in the 4 right exertions (<i>samma-p, padhānāni</i>); ¹⁵ | |
| (3) mindfulness, | seen in the 4 focusses of mindfulness (<i>sati'paṭṭhāna</i>); ¹⁶ | |
| (4) concentration, | seen in the 4 dhyanas (<i>jhāna</i>); | |
| (5) wisdom, | seen in the comprehension of the 4 noble truths. | (A 5.15/3:11 f) |

2.3 The identity of the faculties and the powers

One of the earliest Pali passages showing the distinction between *indriya* and *bala* is probably this statement in **the Paṭisambhidā, magga**:

The meaning of *saddh'indriya* is to be directly known as commitment, the meaning of *viriy'indriya* as taking on, the meaning of *sat'indriya* as standing near, the meaning of *samādh'indriya* as non-distraction, the meaning of *paññ'indriya* as seeing.

The meaning of *saddhā, bala* is to be directly known as unshakeability with regard to the lack of faith, the meaning of *viriya, bala* as unshakeability with regard to idleness, the meaning of *sati, bala* as unshakeability with regard to heedlessness, the meaning of *samādhi, bala* as unshakeability with regard to excitement, the meaning of *paññā, bala* as unshakeability with regard to ignorance...

The meaning of the *indriyā* is to be directly known as overlordship. The meaning of the *balā* is to be directly known as unshakeability.

Saddh'indriyassa adhimokkh'aṭṭho abhiññeyyo, viriy'indriyassa paggah'aṭṭho...sat'indriyassa upaṭṭhān'aṭṭho...samādh'indriyassa avikkhep'aṭṭho...paññ'indriyassa dassan'aṭṭho...

Saddhā, balassa assaddhiye akampiy'aṭṭho abhiññeyyo, viriya, balassa kosajje...sati, balassa pamāde...samādhimbalassa uddhacce...paññā, balassa avijjāya...

Indriyānaṃ adhipateyy'aṭṭho abhiññeyyo, balānaṃ akampiy'aṭṭho abhiññeyyo.

(Pm 1:17 f abridged; cf Pm 1:21, 2:119 f)

From the canonical Abhidhamma, however, we get the general impression that the faculties (*indriyā*) are weaker than the powers (*bala*) (eg Dhs 10.3). The **Netti-p, pakaraṇa**, a para-canonical work (regarded as canonical in Myanmar) states that “these same faculties under the influence of energy (*viriya, vasena*) become powers” (Nett 100).

However, **the Sāketā Sutta** (S 48.43) clearly states that “that which are the 5 faculties are the 5 powers; that which are the powers are the 5 faculties” (*yāni pañc'indriyāni tāni pañca, balāni, yaṇi*

¹⁴ The 4 qualities of a streamwinner: unshakable faith in (1) the Buddha, (2) the Dharma, and (3) the Sangha; (4) having moral virtue dear to the Saints. See D 33, 1.11(14); S 55.1. The qualities are known by various other names, reflecting its importance: desirable states (*ākaṅkhiya-ṭ, ṭhāna*, S 5:356), the mirror of the Dharma (*dharm'ādāsa*, D 2:93 = S 5:357), the divine path to the realm of the gods (*devānaṃ deva, padāni*, S 55.34-35/5:392), the flood of meritorious and of wholesome actions (*puññābhisanda kusalābhisanda*, S 55.31-32/5:391)

¹⁵ So called on their own. As part of the noble eightfold path (*magga*), the 4 right exertions are called “right efforts” (*sammā, vāyāma*): (1) the effort to avoid (unwholesome states) (*saṃvara, padhāna*); (2) the effort to abandon (unwholesome states) (*pahāna, padhāna*); (3) the effort to cultivate (wholesome states) (*bhavanā, padhāna*); and (4) the effort to maintain (wholesome states) (*anurakkhaṇa, padhāna*) (V 1:22; S 1:105, 3:96; A 2:15, 16, 74, 3:12, 4:13, 125).

¹⁶ The 4 focusses of mindfulness (satipaṭṭhāna): (1) contemplation of the body (*kāyānupassanā*); (2) contemplation of feelings (*vedanā'nupassanā*); (3) contemplation of the mind (*cittānupassanā*); (4) contemplation of mind-objects (*dharmānupassanā*). See **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22) or **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10), SD 10.1.

pañca, balāni tāni pañc'indriyāni, S 48.43/5:219 f). This explanation clearly has nothing to do with degrees of intensity. In fact, the Nikāyas tell us nothing more about the difference between the two sets, except that while *the five faculties* need to be cultivated, *the five powers* are “unshakable” by their opposites [2.2].

3 (Pañcaka) Ananussuta Sutta (A 5.11)

3.1 ANANUSSUTA

3.1.1 The term “unheard” (*ananussuta*), or more literally, “not heard after,” is often used to describe the Buddha Dharma. The CPD defines *an-anussuta* (mfn) as “of which there is no tradition, not heard before.”¹⁷ There is a discourse called (**Satipaṭṭhāna) Ananussuta Sutta** (S 47.31), where the focuses of mindfulness are said to be “unheard” before. It is the first of a set of 10 suttas, all dealing with the focuses of mindfulness, constituting **the Chapter on the Unheard** (*ananussuta, vagga*), the 4th chapter of the Satipaṭṭhāna Saṃyutta (S 47).¹⁸

3.1.2 The Dhamma, cakka Pavattana Sutta (S 56.11), in its description of the 4 noble truths, declares that they are said to be “things unheard before” (*ananussutesu dhammesu*).¹⁹ Apparently, this statement on “things unheard before” refers to the fact that the liberating Dharma has been forgotten in India up to the Buddha’s time, in the sense that they have not been really and fully understand as to bring about awakening and liberation.²⁰

3.2 ABHIÑÑĀ, VOSĀNA, PĀRAMI-P, PATTĀ

3.2.1 The Sutta contains a rare term, “attained accomplishment and perfection of direct knowledge” (*abhiññā, vosāna, pārami-p, patto*)—found only here, and in **the Mahā Sakul’udāyi Sutta** (M 77), where it occurs 19 times, all in connection with the qualities of the Buddha for which his disciples respect and emulate him.²¹

3.2.2 The Sutta’s commentary explains *abhiññā, vosāna, pārami-p, patto* as follows. The Buddha declares (*paṭijānāmi*, “I claim”) so because “**I claim to have gained accomplishment and perfection**” means that he [the Buddha] shows the virtues he has himself arrived at, sitting cross-legged, under the great bodhi, thus, ‘On account of having completed the work of the sixteenfold tasks of the 4 truths [3.2.3], with the realization of the 4 paths [3.2.3], having accomplished all my tasks, attained supremacy, I claim to have attained the beyond [nirvana].’²² (AA 3:225)

¹⁷ D 2:33,6 = S 2:9,11; 105,4 f; 5:179,1; M 2:211,17; A 3:9,14; Pug 14,12; Nm 1:457,18.

¹⁸ S 47/5:178-184; S 47.1/5:178 f @ SD 10.5(3). The phrase *ananussuta, dhammesu* (pl) occurs at Ap 614,14 (which prob should be read *ananussutesu dhammesu*).

¹⁹ S 56.11,9-12/5:422 f; V 1:10-12 @ SD 1.1.

²⁰ See KvuA 78. See also **Dhammacakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11,9-12), SD 1.1 & also SD 49.3 (4.3.3).

²¹ M 77,44-62 (SD 49.6).

²² *Abhiññāvosaṇapāramippatto paṭijānāmīti catūsu saccesu catūhi maggehi soḷasa, vidhassa kiccassa karaṇena abhijānitvā vosāna, pāramiṃ sabbesaṃ kiccānaṃ niṭṭhitattā kata, kicca, bhāvaṃ pāraṃ patto paṭijānāmīti mahā, - bodhi, pallaṅke attano āgamaṇiya, guṇaṃ dasseti* (AA 3:225).

3.2.3 The “4 paths” (*magga*) are those of streamwinning, of once-return, of non-return, and of arhat-hood, that is, the way to awakening from ignorance and craving to full spiritual liberation.²³ **The “16 tasks of the 4 truths”** are a commentarial set of aspects (*ākāra*) of the truths, probably through Mahāyāna influence (such as the *Abhidharmakośa* ch 7.13a). Briefly, the aspects of **the 4 truths** are as follows (note that the terms here are in Sanskrit):²⁴

- (1) suffering: impermanence (*anitya*), unsatisfactory (*duḥkha*), emptiness (*śūnyatā*), non-self (*anātman*).
- (2) arising: arising (*samudaya*), production (*prabhava*), cause (*hetu*), condition (*pratyaya*).
- (3) ending: ending (*nirodha*), serenity (*śānta*), sublimity (*praṇīta*); escape (*niḥsaraṇa*).
- (4) path: path (*mārga*), rightness (*nyāya*), practice (*pratipatti*), release (*nairyāṇika*).

3.3 RELATED SUTTAS

A parallel treatment of the 4 grounds for self-confidence	Vesārajja Sutta	A 4.8 ²⁵
A set of 6 tathagata’s powers	(Chakka) Sīha,nāda Sutta	A 6.64 ²⁶
A set of 10 tathagata’s powers	(Dasaka) Sīha,nāda Sutta	A 10.21 ²⁷
Another set of 10 tathagata’s powers	Adhimutti,pada Sutta	A 10.22 ²⁸

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SD 10.5(3)

(Pañcaka) Ananussuta Sutta

The (Fives) Discourses on the Unheard | **A 5.11/3:9**

Traditional: A 5.1.2.1 = *Ānguttara Nikāya* 5, *Pañcaka Vagga* 1, *Paṭhama Paṇṇāsaka* 2, *Bala Vagga* 1

Theme: The 5 powers as the Buddha’s awakening

- 1 *Pubbâham bhikkhave ananussutesu dhammesu abhiññā,vosāna,pārami-p,patto paṭijānāmi.*
- 2 *Pañc’imāni bhikkhave tathāgatassa tathāgata,balāni, yehi balehi samannāgato tathāgato āsabham ṭhānam paṭijānāti, parisāsu sīha,nādam nadati, brahma,cakkaṃ pavatteti.*
- 3 *Katamāni pañca?*
Saddhā,balaṃ, hirī,balaṃ, ottappa,balaṃ, vīriya,balaṃ, paññā,balaṃ—
- 4 *Imāni kho bhikkhave pañca tathāgatassa tathāgata,balāni yehi balehi samannāgato tathāgato āsabham ṭhānam paṭijānāti, parisāsu sīha,nādam nadati, brahma,cakkaṃ pavatteti.*

1 Bhikshus, I declare that I have attained accomplishment and perfection of direct knowledge regarding things unheard before.

²³ On the 4 paths (sainthood), see **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22,42-47), SD 3.13; **Ānāpāna,sati S** (M 118,9-12), SD 7.13; **Samaṇa-m-acala S 1** (A 4.87), SD 20.13 + **S 2** (A 4.88), SD 20.14.

²⁴ For related canonical lists, cf A 1:38 (list of perceptions, *saññā*), A 4:422. Also see Pm 1:107, 118, 2:241; *Vism* 16.14-19/494 f. For a scholarly analysis, see Alex Wayman, “The sixteen aspects of the four noble truths and their opposites,” *JlABS* 3,2 1980:67-76. Repr in (ed) G Elder, *Buddhist Insight*, Delhi, 1984:117-127.

²⁵ A 4.8/2:8 f.

²⁶ A 6.64/3:417-420.

²⁷ A 10.21/5:32-36.

²⁸ A 10.22/5:36-38.

2 Bhikshus, there are these 5 tathagata's powers that a Tathagata [Buddha thus come] has, accomplished in which, he claims the place of the leading bull, roars the lion-roar in the assemblies, and sets in motion the divine [perfect] wheel.

3 What are the five?

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| (1) The power of faith. | <i>saddhā,bala</i> |
| (2) The power of moral shame. | <i>hiri,bala</i> |
| (3) The power of moral fear. | <i>ottappa,bala</i> |
| (4) The power of effort. | <i>virīya,bala</i> |
| (5) The power of wisdom. | <i>paññā,bala</i> |

4 These, bhikshus, are the 5 tathagata's powers that a Tathagata has, accomplished in which, he claims the place of the leading bull, roars the lion-roar in the assemblies, and sets in motion the divine [perfect] wheel.

— evaṃ —

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