

Pañca Bala

The five spiritual powers

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1 Sarakāṇi Sutta (S 55.24/5:377)

In this passage, we can see the different kinds or levels of faith (*saddhā*): as a spiritual faculty (*indriya*) and as a spiritual power (*bala*). Here “wise confidence” (*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 ghost 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 five spiritual faculties*. And he holds mere faith in the Tathāgata, mere love for him.⁹

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

² “Truth-follower,” *dharmānussarī*. 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 **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1/3:225), these two types of person have reached the plane of the Noble Ones but have not yet realized the fruit of Stream-winning, 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” (*ākāravatī,-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) Introd 3a 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 five aggregates are all impermanent, suffering and not self (Pm 21.18/2:200). See prev n.

⁶ The 5 spiritual faculties, see Introd above.

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

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

⁹ “Mere faith...mere love,” *saddhā,mataṃ hoti pema,mattaṃ*. The “mere” here emphasizes the quality it qualifies. A similar statement is found in Alagaddūpamā S (M 22.4/ 1:141) & Bhaddāli S (M 1:444/ 65.27): “Those who have mere faith in me and mere love for me,” (*yesaṃ mayi saddhā,mattaṃ pema,mattaṃ*). Comy explains that this refers to the insight practitioners (*vipassaka puggalā*) who have not attained any supramundane state, not gaining even Stream-entry, they are reborn in a heaven. On the other hand, we can take this passage as is, that is, anyone who has “mere faith, mere love” in the Buddha are reborn in a heaven, without going against the grain of early Buddhism. See M:ÑB 2001:1212 n274.

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

13 Even these great sal trees¹⁰, Mahānāma, if they could understand what is well spoken and what is ill spoken, I would declare them to be Stream-winners, no longer bound to the lower world, of fixed destiny, sure of awakening!

2 Faculties and powers

The five faculties (*pañc'indriya*)¹¹ 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*).¹² According to **the Pañca Bala Sutta 2** (A 5.15) the faculties are transformed into powers in this manner:

- (1) Faith, seen in the 4 qualities of the stream-winner (*sotāpannassa aṅgāni*);¹³
- (2) Effort, seen in the 4 right exertions (*samma-p, padhānāni*);¹⁴
- (3) Mindfulness, seen in the 4 focusses of mindfulness (*sati'paṭṭhāna*);¹⁵
- (4) Concentration, seen in the 4 dhyanas (*jhāna*);
- (5) Wisdom, seen in the comprehension of the 4 noble truths. (A 5.15/3:11 f)

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...

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

¹¹ The 5 faculties (*pañc'indriya*). For a traditional exposition, see for example, Ledi Sayadaw, 1965:338-348.

¹² The 5 powers (*pañca bala*). For a traditional exposition, see for example, Ledi Sayadaw, 1965:348-356.

¹³ The 4 qualities of a Stream-winner: unshakable faith in (1) the Buddha, (2) the Dharma, and (3) the Sangha; (4) moral virtue dear to the Saints. See D 331.11(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 (*dhamm'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)

¹⁴ 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) (*samvara, 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).

¹⁵ 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 (*dhammānupassanā*). See **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22) or **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10) = SD 10.1 (2005).

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)

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