

Panca Indriya and Panca Bala - Five Faculties and Five Powers

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1. These are included in the 37 factors of Enlightenment; see, “[37 Factors of Enlightenment](#)”.

2. “*Indriya*” means leader; a leader has power or “*Bala*”. Thus these two sets of five factors each are very important in following the Noble Eightfold Path.

- The five mental faculties (*indriya*) are *saddhā* (faith), *virīya* (effort), *sati* (mindfulness), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (wisdom), and there are five corresponding powers (*Bala*).
- Eye, ear, nose, tongue, and the body are the five physical faculties (*indriya*). They are leaders in providing access to seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. The *panca indriya* are the “mental” leaders helping with comprehending Dhamma.

3. Let us first discuss the five faculties.

- *Saddhā* is foremost; without faith (*saddhā*), one does not have the conviction to follow the Path. However, faith has to be based on wisdom (*paññā*), i.e., one’s faith is built upon seeing the truth of Buddha Dhamma, at least partially.
- *Saddhā* comes from “*sath*” or truth and “*dhā*” meaning “*dhāranaya*” or “grasp”. Thus one will have *saddhā* when one grasps the true nature of this world (*tilakkhana*) at least to some extent.
- Blind faith is actually a hindrance to progress, since one will be following the wrong path. Furthermore, blind faith will not last long, since it is on a shaky foundation. *Saddhā* of a *Sōtapannā* is unshakable, and will never be lost or even reduced.

Thus we can see the *saddhā* and *paññā* need to progress together.

4. When *saddhā* and *paññā* is developed to a certain extent (before the *Sōtapannā* stage), one realizes the fruitlessness and the dangers of the *sansaric* journey. Thus one is motivated to make an effort (*virīya*).

- Furthermore, one realizes that one needs to be mindful in one’s actions, and thus *sati* (mindfulness) starts to build. One realizes that one has to act with *yoniso manasikara*.
- At the same time, one realizes that when the mind is not calm, one can make bad decisions; thus one starts working on calming the mind and to attain a

level of concentration (*samādhi*). Concentration is not really a good translation for *samādhi*; one does not need to force concentration; rather *samādhi* comes about when one takes precautions to not to get into “bad situations” ; see, “[What is Samadhi? - Three Kinds of Mindfulness](#)” .

5. Different people have the five faculties developed to different degrees (developed in this life AND also carried from previous lives), and normally one could stand out. The Buddha has shown the following way to identify the predominance of different faculties in a person.

- If someone has a relatively more developed *saddhā*, that person is likely to be peaceful and helpful to others with a kind heart. He/she will have no trouble in following the first precept of not harming any other being.
- Then there are people who can easily bear hardships and are very determined; they have a developed *virīya* (effort) *indriya*. They can easily keep the second precept (not taking what is not given), and be satisfied with one earns by one’ s hard work.
- Those who do not pursue sense fulfilment aggressively have less *kamachanda* and are not likely to have any problems with the third precept. They are likely to have a developed mindfulness (*sati*) faculty.
- When the *samādhi* *indriya* is strong, that person is likely to be quiet and does not like to engage in idle chatter; thus keeping the fourth precept on right speech will be easy for them.
- Someone with *paññā* (wisdom) will be able to comprehend *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anatta* easily and thus to realize the fruitlessness and the dangers of the *sansaric* journey. Such a person will be able to keep the hardest fifth precept on controlling the mind; see, “[The Five Precepts - What the Buddha Meant by Them](#)” .

6. Once one identifies the strong faculty, one should try to exploit that to move forward; the other faculties always pitch in to help, so they will grow too. It is important to cultivate all five faculties until they become powers (*bala*), but one needs to exploit the predominant one.

- If someone tells a child, “this is not your actual Mom; she is somewhere else” , the child will not only refuse to believe that but will run to the mother and give a hug just to show how confident he is. In the same way, *saddhā* based on *paññā* can only make one’ s resolve be strengthened by obstacles.
- For example, when one does not have *saddhā*, one can be influenced to change the course by an outside influence. But if *saddhā*, built on *paññā*, is strong no matter how strong the influence is one’ s faith will not be shaken.
- The Buddha gave a simile to understand the how *indriya* can become *bala* to overcome difficulties: When a river runs into an obstacle like a large boulder, it splits and goes around it, and merge together after the obstacle. But the *indriya* needs to be strong enough to do that.
- When *indriya* (faculties) are strengthened, they become *bala* (powers).

7. When the faculties are being cultivated, it is important to try to balance them, while utilizing the predominant faculty's power.

- Some people have *paññā* and may say, “it is useless to take precepts or chant “*Tisarana*” or chant/listen to *suttas*; it is better to learn Dhamma”. But those activities do help in getting the mind to be receptive to Dhamma; see, “[Buddhist Chanting](#)”.
- On the other hand, just reciting those verses is not enough. In order to recite them with understanding, one needs to learn Dhamma and cultivate *paññā*.
- Normally, *saddhā* and *paññā* go together and needs to be balanced. Similarly, *virīya* (effort) and *samādhi* (concentration) need to be balanced. For example, when doing formal meditation, too much of an effort can be a drawback for *samādhi*. As the Buddha told Sona the musician, the strings on a violin need to be just right, not too tight and not too loose.
- *Sati* (mindfulness) must be leading and must always be there.
- *Sati* can be compared to the steering wheel of a car; *saddhā* and *paññā* can be compared to one set wheels, and *virīya* and *samādhi* can be compared to the other set of wheels. The wheels must be in balance and the steering wheel must be kept at correct position all the time for the car to go forward. If the wheels are not balanced, the car will just go in circles; if the steering wheel is not managed, the car will go off the road.

8. These five (*saddhā*, *virīya*, *sati*, *samādhi*, *paññā*) are *cetasika* (mental factors). They help define one's character (*gati*) for the better, and these five are important ones to “take in” or “*āna*” in *ānapāna sati*.

9. The five faculties exercise control in their respective domains: *saddhā* in the domain of *adhimokkha* (decision or resolve), *virīya* in *paggaha* (exertion), *sati* in *upatthāna* (awareness), *samādhi* in *avikkhepa* (non-distraction), and *paññā* in *dassana* (view or vision). When they become *bala* (powers), they become unshakable by their opposites - indecision, laziness, negligence, agitation, and delusion or ignorance.

- It is important to realize the value of *citta pasāda* (joy) and *adhimokkha* (resolve) that results from *saddhā* based on true understanding: *adhimokkha* is an intermediate step in *Kusala-mula paticca samuppada* on the way to Nibbana, see, “[Kusala-Mula Paticca Samuppada](#)”.
- Also, *citta pasāda* and *adhimokkha* that arise in doing meritorious acts with joy in the heart are key to optimizing the merits; see, “[A Simple Way to Enhance Merits \(Kusala\) and Avoid Demerits \(Akusala\)](#)”, and “[Javana of a Citta - The Root of Mental Power](#)”.

10. The five indriya become five *bala* and are well balanced only for an *Arahant*. We can reap many benefits even before reaching that ultimate goal by cultivating them, making sure to try to keep them balanced.

- Even for an *Arahant*, there are some leftover “imperfections” even though they are not defilements; these are some “hard-to-get-rid-of” quirks in personal behavior. For example, there is this story about a very young Arahant who had the habit of jumping over puddles instead of going around them; he had been born a monkey for many lives in the recent past and had carried that habit over to this life.
- Only a *Sammā Sambuddha* (like Buddha Gotama) is perfect in every respect. This is why he is called “*tatagatha*” (“*thatha*” for “what should be” or the “real nature” ; pronounced “*thathagatha* “).