

Some Notes on Kamalaśīla's Understanding of Insight Considered as the Discernment of Reality
(*bhūta-pratyavekṣā*).

Author

ABSTRACT: The present article aims to explain Kamalaśīla's understanding of the nature of insight, specifically considering it as the 'discernment of reality' (*bhūta-pratyavekṣā*) -- a technical term identified with insight (*vipaśyanā*) in the author's well known *Bhāvanākramaḥ* texts. I approach my analysis of *bhūta-pratyavekṣā* from three different angles. I begin by providing a rationale for its translation. This is followed by an account of Kamalaśīla's reading of key passages in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* describing the process to which the term refers. Here the aim is to illustrate Kamalaśīla's understanding of *bhūta-pratyavekṣā* as it is actually experienced in meditation. The final section examines *bhūta-pratyavekṣā* in relation to other important technical terminology employed in the course of making arguments against his historical rival in debate, the Ch'an monk Mo ho yen. By providing these three different perspectives on the same process it is my hope that both scholars and practitioners will be able to more fully comprehend and benefit from the instructions provided by the ancient master Kamalaśīla.

1. *Translating bhūta-pratyavekṣā*

In a recent article (Author) I attempted to show how Kamalaśīla (740-795 CE), in his three *Bhāvanākramas*, subscribed to a conception of ‘insight’ (*vipaśyanā*) that is at once experiential and conceptual in nature. Incorporating the Buddhist paradigm of three levels of understanding into my account (*śrutamayī*-, *cintamayī*-, and *bhāvanāmayī-prajñā*), I argued that insight should be identified with the wisdom that consists in meditation (*bhāvanāmayī-prajñā*). Thus insight is to be understood as experience (*anubhāva*) undergone in meditation (*bhāvanā*, *samādhi*). I also noted how Kamalaśīla explicitly identifies insight with the technical term *bhūta-pratyavekṣā*.¹ This Sanskrit compound might be rendered in a number of ways, the variations depending on one's lexical choices for the two individual components, as well as the relationship understood to obtain between them. For example, all of the following are possible: true examination, correct analysis, exact investigation, investigation of the real, discernment of reality, analysis of reality, and so on. In this paper I employ the translation ‘discernment of reality’. In this section I will try to show that this translation best captures the meanings of the individual components of the compound. In addition, in taking a genitive relationship to obtain between the compound's two members, it also closely conforms to Kamalaśīla's own explanations.

Most scholars who have worked on the *Bhāvanākramas* have opted for translations that take *bhūta-pratyavekṣā* as a *karma-dhāraya* compound. The first member, *bhūta*, is understood as an adjective qualifying the second, *pratyavekṣā*. For example, David S. Ruegg's usual translation is ‘correct analysis’ (1989, 110), although in

some instances he opts for ‘exact analysis’ or ‘exact analytic investigation’ (96, 64). Olson and Ichishima render the compound ‘true examination’ (1979, 27-29).

Such translations might be seen as having the merit of indicating that the cognition involved in *pratyavekṣā* is of a special sort. *i.e.* it is not merely a case of ordinary *pratyavekṣā*, but more particularly one that is true or correct. Just as *vipaśyanā* is a special kind of seeing, indicated by the prefix *vi-* (See Author, XX), so too, it might be thought, *bhūtapratyavekṣā* is special kind of cognition, one that is epistemically faithful to the object cognized.

Yet it is also the case that *bhūta* may be translated substantively as ‘what is,’ ‘the real,’ ‘reality,’ and so on.² The word holds a spectrum of meanings, shading from the clearly epistemic (e.g. correct, exact, true) to the clearly ontic (e.g. what has become, element, reality). Here, grammatically, the adjectival and substantive correspond to the epistemic and the ontic senses respectively. In translating the compound, if one wished to emphasize the veracity of the cognition involved in *pratyavekṣā* one would tend to choose from among the former set of possibilities. If, on the other hand, one wished to emphasize the actuality of the object cognized one would want to opt for one of the latter; this is the course I have chosen in taking the compound to be a *ṣāṣṭhī-tatpuruṣa*.³

Grammatically *bhūta* is the past passive participle of the verbal root $\sqrt{bhū}$. Taken substantively, it can refer to anything that is the result of a natural process of becoming (*bhāva*). In most instances the word would not in itself be understood as referring to something that results from a process of *deliberate* cultivation (*bhāvanā*); in that case we would expect to find the causal sense reflected in a strengthened base:

'*bhāvita*' as opposed to *bhūta*. Thus initially, in the context of meditation, it seems most appropriate to take the word as referring either to the elements of conventional reality (*dharmas*), which arise on their own – or else to some aspect of these elements that is real irrespective of one's realization of it. In Mādhyamika hermeneutics the term *bhūta* is associated with the meaning that is *ultimately* real, i.e. the 'object' indicated in *nītārtha* teachings (See Thurman 1978, 32-34, Author, XX). Indeed Kamalaśīla takes the term this way himself, explicitly identifying it with the selflessness of persons and *dharmas*.

And discerning reality is said to be insight. But reality (*bhūta*, T. *yang dag pa*) is the selflessness of persons and *dharmas* (*puḍgaladharmanairātmya*, T. *gang zag dang / chos la bdag med pa*). Here, the selflessness of the person is the aggregates' lack of self and belonging to a self. The selflessness of *dharmas* is precisely their being like an illusion.⁴

Thus from this passage it would appear that Kamalaśīla himself adhered to a non-adjectival understanding of *bhūta*; it is here clearly identified with the abstract noun, *nairātmya* or selflessness.

As for the compound's second member, *pratyavekṣā*, it too has a wide spectrum of possible meanings -- ranging from perceptual cognition at the one end to intellectual cognition at the other: 'perception,' 'observation,' 'examination,' 'discernment,' 'analysis,' and 'investigation.'" The word 'discernment' seems to occupy somewhat of a middle position, carrying perceptual as well as intellectual connotations.⁵ In the

present context this is highly desirable. The Sanskrit word is derived from the verbal root *√īkṣ*, which means to see, behold, perceive, view, observe, look or gaze at. It is combined with the *upasārga* prefixes 'prati-' (toward, back to) and 'ava-' (down). In philosophical contexts the latter often suggests a sense of depth or penetration. The total sense of *pratyavekṣā*, then, is both 'looking deeply into' and 'reflecting back upon'. With *bhūta* understood as its object, the entire compound can be seen to convey the sense of 'Reflecting upon (and) looking deeply into reality.'

2. The Discernment of Reality according to the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*

But in what, exactly, does this process actually consist? What is it like? What does Kamalaśīla really understand by the discernment of reality? I have suggested elsewhere that the process possesses two aspects, observation and analysis, both of which are conceptual and both of which occur when the practitioner is in a condition of *samādhi*. (Author)

Here I will attempt to flesh out our account of the discernment of reality in experiential terms. I will try to provide a phenomenologically 'thick' description of the two-fold process of insight meditation according to the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, as related by Kamalaśīla in all three *Bhāvanākramas*. I will not attempt to provide a philosophical explanation for the contents of the realizations undergone; rather I will try to illustrate what kind of a process we are talking about, what the process actually 'feels like' for the person who undertakes it. Most of the details in this connection are found in first Bhk, where the process is referred to as the 'cultivation of wisdom' (*prajñābhāvanā*). This

account is recapitulated, but with fewer details, in the third Bhk; here the discussion takes place in the context of spelling out the meaning of *bhūtapratyavekṣā*, which is further identified with insight. A few additional details are provided in the middle text.⁶

The overall picture painted by Kamalaśīla is that of a kind of serial alternation between observation and analysis that takes place entirely within the sphere of meditative concentration.⁷ What we find described is a series of experiential judgements about (or, better, 'directed at') a sequence of progressively more refined realities, or *dharmas*, perceived in meditation. Each judgement is, in effect, an act of abandonment or 'letting go' of the *dharmas* under consideration. These judgements are interspliced with moments in which there is only a non-inferential direct experiencing of the *dharmas*, upon which the analysis is then based. Thus both observation and analysis are involved. But note that the alternation is not between a nonconceptual *samādhi* and an ordinary inferential process; it is, rather, between a conceptual *samādhi* that 'views' recognized meditation objects and a special kind of meditative process that analyses those objects *experientially*. The alternation is thus between meditative observation and meditative analysis. Both components, taken together, appear to be what is meant by *bhūtapratyavekṣā*. The entire process is conceptual (*savikalpa*) in the sense that concepts are present throughout.⁸ Initially, the practitioner stabilizes the mind on the five aggregates; thereafter one analyses *dharmas* with material form:

First of all the yogin should analyse (*vicārayet*, T. *dpyad par bya*) those *dharmas* having a material form, imagined by others as being external objects: 'Are these other than consciousness, or is it this consciousness itself appearing in that

manner -- just as in dream-state'? In that regard (if the position is held is that they have a nature) outside of consciousness, he should break (them) down into atoms (*paramāṇuśo vicārayet*, T. *rdul phra rab tu bshig ste*). And while discerning the atoms in terms of parts (*bhāgaśaḥ pratyavekṣamāṇaḥ*, T. *cha shas so sor brtags pa*), the yogin does not see (*na samanupaśyati*, T. *mi mthong*) those objects. And because he does not see (them), he understands, 'All this is indeed mind-only, an external object does not exist'. And thus, 'Having attained mind-only (*cittamātram samāruhya*; T. *sems tsam la ni rab brten nas*), one could not imagine an external object'. The meaning is that he would abandon conceptualizations of *dharmas* with material form. On the basis of (this) nonapprehension he should analyse those things that are in principle apprehensible (*teṣam upalabdhilakṣaṇaprāptānām*, T. *dmigs su rung ba'i mtshan nyid du gyur pa de dag*). Thus having broken down (*vibhāvya*, T. *rnam par bshig nas*) *dharmas* with material form, he should break down those without material form.⁹

It is very apparent that in this passage the analyses of experienced *dharmas* are considered parts of a process of meditation (*bhāvanākrama*) -- the inferences comprising the analyses are not simply instances of intellectual understanding or *cintāmayī prajñā*. They compose a system of progressively more subtle insights into the nature of reality. While they clearly possess the character of wisdom (*prajñā*), because they are undertaken in a condition of *samādhi* they are properly considered instances of *bhāvanāmayī prajñā*. They are distinct from cases of ordinary intellectual inference insofar as they are directly 'based upon' objects being concurrently experienced in

meditation. The meditator remains one-pointedly focused upon these mental images, holding them in view while simultaneously ‘analysing’ them. In brief: one looks, recognizes the object, and continues to analyse it while holding one’s gaze. Recognizing its unreality, one abandons it. The process might be thought of as analogous to research undertaken with a microscope: one focuses, recognizes the object one wishes to observe, and makes one’s observations. After drawing one’s conclusions about the object, one lets go of it. One then looks again with a new, revised object in mind -- one’s new observations being based upon the conclusions reached thus far.¹⁰ The conclusion drawn in each instance is that the observed object is not real. One moves on to the next purported ‘reality’ at a level that is one step more subtle and profound than the preceding. But here, recalling the Buddhist context, it is important to recognize that there is an affective aspect to this process that is missing in the scientific analogy; for in recognizing the unreality of an object the meditator is also recognizing that it is not worthy of attachment, that such attachment would only lead to *duḥkha*. One knows and sees that the object is not to be held onto, and so one lets go of it. Thus the process of is one of ever-deepening non-attachment.

In the above passage the meditator begins by examining *dharmas* with material form in terms of their constituent atoms. Upon breaking these atoms down further into their constituent parts he realizes that no separate external reality remains. Articulating this, he concludes that all so-called material *dharmas* do not exist; they are, in fact, mental in nature. The fact that the analysis described here is not a case of ordinary reasoning is reflected in the language employed: the objects of analysis (*dharmas* with material form) are ‘broken down’ or dissolved (*vibhāvya*, T. *rnam par bshig*

bya) before the mind's eye, as it were.¹¹ In general, each object of the increasingly subtle analysis might be thought of as constituting the experiential subject term of a subsequent analytic judgment directed 'at' or 'towards' it. The inferences based upon these meditation objects can thus be considered instances of a special kind of perceptual or quasi-perceptual judgment, which results in ever-increasing nonattachment on the part of the meditator.¹²

While it seems clear that Kamalaśīla regarded this mental process as perceptual or quasi-perceptual in nature, such a notion might not be intuitively obvious to a modern western interpreter. The inclination might be to think of the whole procedure as basically one of ordinary rational thought (*cintāmayī prajñā*). One would then want to translate *bhūtapratyavekṣā* accordingly as 'correct analysis'. But it should now be clear that taking this phrase to refer to a purely rational process would be to significantly impoverish Kamalaśīla's account. Such an interpretation would miss both the affective and the perceptual dimensions of the process.

That such an understanding does not accurately reflect Kamalaśīla's own views can be seen clearly in the passages that follow. Therein a meditative analysis is performed on mental *dharmas*. A conclusion is reached that the subject side of the subject-object dichotomy is just as illusory as the object-side, upon which it depends. Mind is recognized as nondual. This 'conclusion' is clearly regarded by Kamalaśīla as an experience. It is a realization, one that forms the basis for the next 'inference,' (or better, perhaps, 'movement') -- the recognition that goes beyond the dualistic knowledge of a nondual mind to enter into a knowledge that is without any appearance of duality whatsoever. Ultimately, Kamalaśīla states, one should not even be attached

to this nondual knowledge of nonduality, since it is too has arisen in dependence upon subject and object -- which have already been established as unreal.¹³ Abiding in such a state, one has come to experience the emptiness of all *dharmas*, up to and including even the knowledge of nonduality.

The meaning is that there too one should abandon attachment to the substantiality of this knowledge of nonduality; one should remain in the knowledge that definitely has no appearance of the knowledge of nonduality. When this is so, one abides in the practical realization of the lack of inherent existence of all *dharmas*. Because the one who abides there enters ultimate truth, there is the entry into nonconceptual *samādhi*. And thus, when the yogin abides in the knowledge that has no appearance of nondual knowledge, then, due to his state of abiding in the ultimate truth he sees the Mahāyāna.¹⁴

Thus according to Kamalaśīla it is through this conceptual process of meditative insight that one experiences the lack of independent existence of persons and *dharmas*. One then enters into a direct nonconceptual realization of the ultimate truth, a realization here identified with the very Mahāyāna itself.

3. *The Discernment of Reality in Arguments against Mo ho yen*

Here one must recall that the very purpose of the *Bhāvanākramas* is to introduce the proper way of practice to those who are entering into the Mahāyāna (Author, XX).

In the context of what may have been a very intense polemical atmosphere surrounding the debates at bSam yas, it would appear that Kamalaśīla was charging his opponent with failing to understand even the most basic aspects of Buddhist theory and practice. Fundamental to Mo ho yen's alleged lack of comprehension was his failure to recognize the necessity of *bhūtapratyavekṣā* for the accomplishment of Buddhahood. Kamalaśīla argues that while Awakening is a nonconceptual state, it is also a state of *knowledge* and as such must be brought about through a process of *understanding*. As we have seen, this process is conceptual. It is a mistake to think that Awakening can arise simply on the basis of nonconceptual concentration. Kamalaśīla employs a number of arguments in this connection. By examining these passages we can glean a few more details as to his conception of insight *qua bhūtapratyavekṣā*. The first point he makes in this connection is as follows:

By rejecting the discernment of reality in this way, one would have rejected the very foremost limb of Awakening -- that which is called 'the discrimination of *dharmas* (*dharmapracaya* T. *chos shin tu rnam par 'byed pa*).¹⁵

Here the idea of 'the discrimination of dharmas' is introduced in order to explain the necessity of the discernment of reality as a component of proper practice. The term *dharmapracaya* is found in the classical Buddhist list of 'the limbs of Awakening' (*bodhyāṅgam* T. *byang chub kyi yan lag*), the factors that need to be developed before Awakening can arise.¹⁶ It refers to the investigation of mental and

physical *dharmas* presented to the mind through mindfulness (*smṛti*, T. *dran pa*). While Kamalaśīla's particular understanding of the exact relationship obtaining between *dharmapracaya* and *bhūtapratyavekṣā* is not spelled out in detail, the following passage provides some indication of their close connection in Kamalaśīla's mind.

Mo ho yen's position is characterized as the view that one can enter into nonconceptuality without first discerning reality conceptually -- simply by not engaging in mental activities that posit or make reference to *dharmas* -- more specifically, the two critical dimensions of meditation known as mindfulness and attention (*manasikāra*, T. *yid la byed pa*):

And without the discernment of reality how could the mind of a yogin, who is habitually attached to entities such as material form since beginningless time, enter into nonconceptuality? If it is said that one enters (nonconceptuality) without mindfulness and without attention toward all *dharmas*, this is not reasonable. For without the discernment of reality it is impossible to undertake either nonmindfulness or nonattention toward all *dharmas*, which are (in any case) being experienced. And if one would (attempt to) bring about nonmindfulness and nonattention toward those (*dharmas*) by meditating along the following lines: 'These which are called *dharmas* are not to be noticed nor paid attention to by me', then all the more would they have been noticed and paid attention to by him! Furthermore, if the mere nonexistence of mindfulness and attention constituted the nonmindfulness and nonattention intended, then in what manner does the nonexistence of those two come about? This itself

should be considered. [*i.e.* how could nonexistence be an effect?] Moreover, nonexistence as a cause is not logical because nonconceptuality would have to occur on its basis. This would entail the entrance into nonconceptuality of someone who has fainted, since mindfulness and attention do not exist for him. Certainly, there is no alternate method lacking in the discernment of reality by means of which one might undertake nonmindfulness and nonattention.¹⁷

Kamalaśīla here attempts to refute the notion that one may enter nonconceptual *samādhi* directly through a simple lack of mindfulness and attention towards *dharmas*. According to Kamalaśīla this is not the kind of ‘nonmindfulness’ (*asmṛti*) and ‘nonattention’ (*amanasikāra*) towards *dharmas* intended in the Buddha’s teachings. Kamalaśīla does not, however, explicitly spell out the meanings of these two technical terms. As negatively prefixed terms, they derive their senses from what they negate. We must therefore gather their meanings from their positive counterparts and from their actual employment. Kamalaśīla argues that it is impossible to undertake nonmindfulness and nonattention towards *dharmas* without the discernment of reality and without being mindful of and paying attention to them. This clearly suggests that these negatively prefixed technical are not to be regarded as indicating the simple absence of that which they negate. Nonmindfulness and nonattention are related in some special way to mindfulness and attention.¹⁸ But to what do these positive terms refer?

Classically, in the context of Buddhist meditation, *smṛti* is a term closely connected to the four foundations of mindfulness (*smṛtyupasthānas*, P. *satipaṭṭhānas*).

Mindfulness practices involve cultivating awareness of the body, feelings, mind and mental contents (*dharmas*). Mindfulness is also the first limb of Awakening (*bodhyaṅga*), upon which the discrimination of *dharmas* is based. There is no explicit discussion of this relationship in exactly these terms in the *Bhāvanākramas*. However, given the strong association of mindfulness and attention it seems likely that Kamalaśīla understood *manasikāra* and *dharmapracaya* as referring to the same process, one that occurs on the basis of *smṛti*.

The term *manasikāra* is somewhat ambiguous. Among the translations it has received we find ‘mentation’ (Ruegg 1989, 94 *et passim*), ‘mental activity’ (and mentation, Higgins 2008) and ‘conscious mental acts’ (Gomez 1987, 108). Gomez (1983: 405) has also translated *manasikāra* as ‘the act of bringing to mind (attention)’ and this is how I have understood the term in its most general and ordinary sense: it refers to a conscious and deliberate act of paying attention to something.¹⁹ As well, it can indicate mental activity based upon such attention.²⁰ But in the context of our concern, the discernment of reality, *manasikāra* appears to have a very specific reference. This is indicated by Kamalaśīla's qualification of it as ‘wise’ or ‘properly grounded’ (*yoniso*). Here I will argue that the qualified term refers to a special kind of attention, identical to the meditative analysis or practice-based perceptual judgement discussed by Kamalaśīla in the context of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*.

It has not, to my knowledge, been pointed out that Kamalaśīla may have viewed *manasikāra* as paralleling another well-known Buddhist meditation term, one that is considerably less prominent in the *Bhāvanākramas*: *saṃprajanya* (T. *shes bzhin*) or ‘clear comprehension.’ This technical term refers to the comparatively passive activity of

continuously noticing or being aware of whatever one is doing, rather than the deliberate undertaking of any particular kind of conceptual activity beyond this.²¹ The possibility of a parallel employment of terms is suggested by the fact that *saṃprajanya* and *smṛti* are strongly associated in the Buddhist tradition, forming a natural dyad in the context of instructions for meditation. In the passages of the *Bhāvanākramas* that we have been dealing with, however, it is *manasikāra* that is paired with *smṛti*. The only points at which *saṃprajanya* is discussed by Kamalaśīla are in contexts where *śamatha* meditation is being discussed.²² Aside from these references in which *smṛti* and *saṃprajanya* appear together, all other references to *smṛti* specifically associate it with *manasikāra*.²³ In these instances the context of discussion has shifted from *śamatha* to *vipaśyanā*. All references to the pair of *smṛti* and *manasikāra* occur in contexts wherein the topic of discussion is insight. This suggests a possible parallel employment of the two terms. Both terms occur in dyads alongside *smṛti*, but *manasikāra* appears to possess a more active sense of deliberate conceptual activity than *saṃprajanya*. While both have *smṛti* as a basis, *saṃprajanya* may be specifically associated with *śamatha*, and *manasikāra* with *vipaśyanā*.

In any case, *manasikāra* appears to be the special factor in virtue of which meditation can become *insight* meditation. It is said to be on account of this specific factor, properly grounded in wisdom, that it becomes possible for nonconceptual knowledge to arise.

Even if this (discernment of reality) has a conceptual nature,
nevertheless on account of the fact it also possesses the nature of wise

attention (*yoniśomanasikāra*; T. *tshul bzhin du yid la byed pa*), it follows that a nonconceptual knowledge of reality arises from it. And thus one who aims for such knowledge must rely upon it.²⁴

These considerations suggest that *bhūtapratyavekṣā* can be identified with the twofold process of *smṛti* and *manasikāra*. Further, in this context *manasikāra* has to be understood as *yoniśomanasikāra* or *dharmapracaya*.²⁵

The entire procedure is one of being mindful of (or observing) *dharmas* (*smṛti*) while attending to (or analysing) them in a way that is wise (*yoniśomanasikāra*). This amounts to analysing *dharmas* in a way that leads to an experience of their most important soteriological aspect: their lack of self or emptiness.²⁶ Such meditative attention is wise because it sees things as they really are.²⁷

These terms indicate aspects of a conceptual process that ultimately gives rise to a nonconceptual knowledge of emptiness. Although positive in the sense of being noetic, this nonconceptual realization is not the same as the positive conceptual process that precedes and gives rise to it.²⁸ By pointing back toward their roots, the negative designations ‘nonmindfulness’ and ‘nonattention’ indicate the transcendent nondual character of a *samādhi* that is also *jñāna*. While positive, because this realization is nonconceptual (*nirvikalpajñāna*), it defies adequate description.

Thus, in stages, the process of insight meditation eventually *issues* in a nonconceptual realization or gnosis, and it is this realization that eliminates

fundamental ignorance. This ineffable nonconceptual state marks the definitive turning point for the bodhisattva, the beginning of the path of seeing. Quoting from the *Kāśyapaparivarta* of the *Ratnakūṭa*, this final result of insight meditation is vividly described in the second *Bhāvanākramaḥ*:

One who only cultivates the mere rejection of mental activity, but who does not meditate having analysed (*so sor brtags*) the nature of entities with wisdom, will never eliminate concepts and will not come to realize the absence of inherent existence -- on account of the absence of the light of wisdom. Thus it was stated by the Illustrious One: 'When the fire of knowing reality as it is arises from the very discernment of reality (*yang dag par so sor rtog pa nyid*), it incinerates the wood of concepts (*rtog pa'i shing*), just as the fire of fire-sticks rubbed together [consumes the sticks themselves]'.²⁹

The *nonconceptual* nature of this realization is clear. The following passage indicates that it is also *nonperceptual*.³⁰ At this stage all forms of dualistic awareness have been transcended. Again, this paradoxical realization is identified with the Mahāyāna itself.

It is exactly this seeing of ultimate truth that is called the Mahāyāna.

And the seeing of ultimate truth is precisely a non-seeing [of anything, *T. ci yang*], which occurs when there is the dawning of genuine knowledge for one who is examining all *dharma*s with the eye of wisdom. And thus it

is said in the *sūtra*, 'What is the seeing of the ultimate truth? It is the nonseeing of all *dharmas*'.³¹

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ABBREVIATIONS

Bhk *Bhāvanākramaḥ*

CIHTS Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies (Namdol, 1997)

M *Majjhima Nikāya* (English translation, Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi, 1995)

ms. manuscript

P. *Pāli*

Skt. *Sanskrit*

T. *Tibetan*

Editions of the Tibetan Tanjur: C – Cone; D – Derge; N – Narthang; P – Peking

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¹ Bhk 3 3.1-4: *tatra śamathas cittaikāgratā / vipaśyanā bhūtapratyavekṣeti samkṣepād āryaratnameghādaḥ bhagavatā śamathavipaśyanayor lakṣaṇam uktam / D 56b3-4: de la mdor na zhi gnas ni sems rtse gcig pa nyid do / lhag mthong ni yang dag pa la rtog pa'o / zhes bcom ldan 'das kyis 'phags pa dkon mchog sprin la sogs pa las zhi gnas dang lhag mthong gi mthsan nyid bka' stsal to / Thus in the noble Ratnamegha and elsewhere the Bhagavān concisely stated the definition of tranquillity and insight, 'Tranquillity is one-pointedness of mind, insight is the discernment of reality'. Unless mentioned otherwise, references are to Tucci (1986) for Bhk 1, D for Bhk 2, and Tucci (1971) for Bhk 3.*

² It will be noticed that in the above passage of the *Ratnamegha*, quoted in Bhk 3 (D56b3-4, note 1 above), *bhūtapratyavekṣā* is rendered *yang dag pa la rtog pa*. Interestingly, when the same passage is quoted in Bhk 2, *bhūtapratyavekṣā* is rendered with the expected *yang dag par so sor rtog pa* (D 47a2). More interesting yet, the version of the *Ratnamegha* found in the P edition has *yang dag pa ji lta ba bzhin du chos la so sor rtog pa* (Goshima 29-30). This is consistent with my argument that a) the first member of the compound should be taken as a noun (here, *chos*) and b) Kamalaśīla understood *bhūtapratyavekṣā* as *dharmapracaya*, on which see section 3 below.

³ On at least one occasion Ruegg (1989, 64) does, in fact, give us *yang dag pa'i so sor rtog pa* rather than *yang dag par so sor rtog pa* for *bhūtapratyavekṣā*, but as far as I can tell this construction does not appear to be attested anywhere in the Tibetan translations of the

Bhāvanākramas. While the use of the Tibetan *yang dag par so sor rtog pa* as a rendering of *bhūtapratyavekṣā*, understood as a Sanskrit *ṣāṣṭhī-tatpuruṣa* compound is possible, it seems somewhat less natural than a reading in which *yang dag par* is taken adverbially, i.e. as indicating the manner in which *so sor rtog pa* occurs --namely, ‘correctly.’ Nevertheless the *la don* connecting the two members of the compound can also be taken as indicating that the first component is the object of the second, which can be read as a verbal noun. In any case, in English the genitive construction is a very natural way of expressing the relationship obtaining between an act of cognition and its object. In view of the ways in which *yang dag par so sor rtog pa* can be analysed according to Tibetan grammar, it is difficult to now say how the contemporary translators into Tibetan understood the Sanskrit term *bhūtapratyavekṣā*. But in a straightforward Sanskrit reading the compound may be taken as either a *karma-dhāraya* or a *ṣāṣṭhī-tatpuruṣa*. The latter rather than the former seems to me to take better account of Kamalaśīla's own explanations. But it would be unwise to be categorical about this.

⁴ Bhk 3 5.17-19: *bhūtapratyavekṣaṇā ca vipaśyanocyate / bhūtaṃ punaḥ pudgaladharmanairātmyaṃ / tatra pudgalanairātmyaṃ yā skandhānām ātmātmīyarahitatā / dharmanairātmyaṃ yā teṣām eva māyopamatā / D 57b4-5: yang dag par so sor rtog pa ni lhag mthong zhes bya'o / yang dag pa ni gang zag dang / chos la bdag med pa'o / de la gang zag la bdag med pa gang phung po rnam bdag dang bdag gi med pa nyid do / chos la bdag med pa ni gan de dag sgyu ma lta bu nyid do /*

⁵ In his discussion of the *Lam rim chen mo*, B. Alan Wallace also translates *so sor rtog pa* (*pratyavekṣaṇā*) as discernment (304) and *yang dag pa* (*bhūta*) as ‘reality’ (308).

⁶ The relevant sections are Bhk 1: 210.3-211.20, Bhk 2 (D48b2-D49a4), Bhk 3: 6.11-9.1

⁷ I take the expression ‘serial alternation’ to describe this method from Ruegg (1989, 111-112) and Williams (1989, 70-72).

⁸ That this entire process involves the employment of concepts has already been argued for at length. (Author). Here I would only add that this is reflected in the Tibetan translation. The Sanskrit *bhūtapratyavekṣā* is always translated with *rtog pa* as opposed to *rtogs pa*, as in *yang dag so sor rtog pa* (or *yang dag rtog pa* at Bhk 2 D 47a2, repeated at Bhk 3 D 56b3-4) -- but not *yang dag so sor rtogs pa*. The latter is unattested in these texts.

⁹ Bhk 1 210.16-211.4: *prathamam yogī ye rūpiṇo dharmā bāhyārthatayā paraiḥ parikalpitās teṣu tāvad vicārayet / kim ete vijñānād anye, āhosvid vijñānam evaitat tathā pratibhāsate, yathā svapnāvasthāyām iti / tatra vijñānād bahiḥ paramāṇuśo vicārayet / paramāṇūmś ca bhāgaśaḥ pratyavekṣamāṇo yogī tān arthān na samanupaśyati / tasyāsamanupaśyata evaṃ bhavati / cittamātram evaitat sarvaṃ na punar bāhyo 'rtho vidyate / tad evam / "cittamātram samāruhya bāhyam arthaṃ na kalpayet" rūpidharmavikalpān tyajed ityarthah / teṣām upa[labdhi]lakṣaṇaprāptānām vicārayed anupalabdheḥ / evaṃ rūpiṇo dharmān vibhāvīyārūpiṇo vibhāvayet / D 33a4-33b1: thog mar rnal 'byor pas chos gzugs can gang dag gzugs la sogs pa phyi rol gyi don du gzhan dag gis brtags pa de dag la ci 'di dag rnam par shes pa*

las gzhan zhig yin nam / 'on te rnam par shes pa de nyid de ltar snang ste / rmi lam gnas skabs ji lta ba bzhi nam zhes dpyad par bya'o / de la rnam par shes pa las phyi rol pa rdul phra rab tu bshig ste / rdul phra rab rnam kyang cha shas kyis so sor brtags na rnal 'byor pas don de dag mi mthong ngo / des de dag ma mthong bas 'di snyam du 'di dag thams cad ni sems tsam ste phyi rol gyi don med do snyam du sems so / 'di ltar / sems tsam la ni rab brten nas / phyi rol don la mi brtag go / zhes de skad 'byung ba ni chos gzugs can la rnam par rtog pa spong ba'o zhes bya ba'i tha tshig go / dmigs su rung ba'i mtshan nyid du gyur pa de dag rnam par dpyad na mi dmigs pa'i phyr ro / de ltar chos gzugs can rnam par bshig nas gzugs can ma yin pa rnam par bshig par bya ste /

¹⁰ Or to use Kamalaśīla's own example, it might be likened to the process of looking at one's face in a mirror. See Author, note 31. Had microscopes or telescopes been known to Kamalaśīla, he might have preferred such metaphors as they suggest the possibility of a progressive deepening of one's observations.

¹¹ In this connection we may notice that the verb employed for this experiential analysis of *dharmas* is rendered in Tibetan as *rnam par bshig* 'to destroy, dismantle, break, break down.' On these occasions the Sanskrit is either *vibhāvya*, or *vicārayet*.

¹² Because the Buddhist tradition regards the mind as a sixth sense organ it seems appropriate to refer to these as perceptual or quasi-perceptual judgements, difficult though such a notion may be.

¹³ This is a synopsis of Bhk 1 211.4-14, D 33b1-33b4.

¹⁴ Bhk 1 211.14-20: *tatrāpy advayajñāne vastutvābhiniveśaṃ tyajet, advayajñānanirābhāsa eva jñāne tiṣṭhed ity arthaḥ / evaṃ sati sarvadharmāṅsvabhāvatāpratipattau sthito bhavati / tatra sthitasya paramatattvapravesāt, nirvikalpasamādhipravesaḥ / tathā cādvyajñānanirābhāse jñāne yadā sthito yogī tadā paramatattve sthitatvāt, mahāyānaṃ sa paśyati / D33b3-5 (CIHTS Bhk 1 T: 49): gnyis med pa'i shes pa de la yang dngos por mngon par zhen pa dor bar bya ste / gnyis med pa'i shes pa snang ba med pa'i shes pa kho na la gnas par bya zhes bya ba'i tha tshig go / de ltar na chos thams cad la ngo bo nyid med par rtogs pa la gnas pa yin no / de la gnas pas yang dag pa nyid kyi chos (ms. mchog) la zhugs pas rnam par mi rtog pa'i ting nge 'dzin la zhugs pa yin no / de ltar rnal 'byor pa gang gi tshe gnyis med pa'i shes pa snang ba med pa'i shes pa la gnas par gyur pa de'i tshe mthong ba'i lam la gnas pas theg pa chen po mthong ngo /*

¹⁵ Bhk 3 15.5-7: *tathā hy anena bhūtapratyavekṣāṃ pratikṣipatā dharmapравicayākhyam pradhānam eva bodhyaṅgaṃ pratikṣiptaṃ syāt / D 62a1: de ltar des yang dag par so sor rtog pa spangs na chos shin tu rnam par 'byed pa zhes bya ba yang dag byang chub kyi yan lag dam pa kho na yang spangs bar 'gyur ro /*

¹⁶ Gethin (1992, 147-154) has made a number of relevant observations about the corresponding Pāli term, *dharmavicaya*. The verbal root √*ci* in *vicaya* has two possible

senses: 1. to gather, accumulate 2. to observe, note. The first meaning is especially indicated when the root is prefixed with 'vi-.' The resulting sense is thus 'to take apart'. This meshes nicely with our discussion of Kamalaśīla's conception of analytic meditation as the 'breaking down' of *dharmas* (*vi + bhāvya*, *vi + cārayet*). The second meaning, 'to observe' corresponds well to that of the verbal root *vikṣ* in *pratyavekṣā*, noted above, as well as to that of the root *√dṛś* in *vipaśyanā* (the Pāli root, in *vipassanā*, is *√pas*. See Adam, 2006: 78).

According to Gethin *dhammavicaya* may be taken to mean either the discrimination of *dhammas* or the discernment of *dhamma*. Understanding *dhamma* in the plural, the term refers to the various mental factors known and cultivated through meditation. Understanding it in the singular, the term seems to refer to the 'order of law of the universe' or, possibly, 'the Buddha's teaching.' The central feature of *dhammavicaya* is the 'discernment of the subtle operation of the view of individuality with regard to the five aggregates' (153-154).

¹⁷ Bhk 3 15.7-16.3: *vinā ca bhūtapratyavekṣayā, yoginaḥ katham anādikālābhyastarūpādibhāvābhiniveśasya cittaṃ nirvikalpatāṃ praviśet? sarvadharmeṣv asmṛtyamanasikāreṇa praviśatīti cet / tad ayuktam / na hi vīna bhūtapratyavekṣayānubhūyamāneṣv api sarvadharmeṣv asmṛtir amanasikāro vā śakyate kartum / yadi ca nāmāmī dharmā mayā 'smartavyā nāpi manasikartavyā ity evaṃ bhāvayān asmṛtīmanasikārau teṣu bhāvayet, tadā sutarām eva tena te smṛtā manasikṛtās ca syuḥ / atha smṛtīmanasikārābhāvamātram asmṛtyamanasikārāv abhipretau, tadā tayor abhāvaḥ kena prakāreṇa bhavati etad eva vicāryate / na cābhāvaḥ kāraṇaṃ yuktaṃ yena tato nirvikalpatā bhavet / saṃmūrchitasyāpi smṛtīmanasikārābhāvān nirvikalpatāpraveśaprasaṅgaḥ / na ca bhūtapratyavekṣaṃ vinānya upāyo 'sti yena prakāreṇāsmṛtyamanasikārau kuryāt // D 62a1-6 yan dag par so sor rtog pa med par rnal 'byor pas thabs gang gis thog ma med pa'i dus nas gzugs la sogs pa'i dngos po la mngon par zhen cing goms pa'i sems rnam par mi rtog pa nyid la rnam par gzhas par bya / gal te chos thams cad la dran pa med pa dang / yid la byed pa med pas 'jug go zhe na / de yang rigs pa ma yin te / yang dag pa so sor rtog pa med par ni nyams su myong ba'i chos thams chad mi dran par bya ba dang / yid la mi bya ba byed mi nus so / gal te bdag gis chos 'di dag dran par mi bya'o / / yid la mi bya'o snyom du de ltar bsgom zhing de dag la dran pa med pa dang / yid la byed pa med pa bsgom pa ni de'i tshe des de dag shin tu dran pa dang / shin tu yid la byas par 'gyur ro / / ci ste dran pa dang / yid la byed pa med pa tsam la dran pa med pa dang / yid la byed pa med pa skad du bya na / de'i tshe de gnyis rnam pa gang gis med par 'gyur ba de nyid dpyad dgos te / med pa ni rgyur rung bar yang mi 'gyur te / gang gis mtshan ma med pa dang / yid la byed pa med pa las rnam par mi rtog pa nyid du 'gyur / de tsam gyi phyir rnam par mi rtog par 'gyur du zin na ni brgyal ba yang dran pa dang / yid la byed pa med pas rnam par mi rtog pa nyid du 'jug par 'gyur ro / yang dag par so sor rtog pa med par rnam pa gzhan gyis dran pa med cing yid la byed pa med par bya ba'i thabs gzhan med do /*

¹⁸ With regard to *amanasikāra* Kamalaśīla states this in the first *Bhāvanākramaḥ*:
But when it is said in the *Avikalpapraveśadhāraṇi*, 'Based on nonattention, one relinquishes phenomenal signs beginning with material form,' the nonattention intended, which is the nonapprehension of one who is discriminating with wisdom, is not a mere absence of attention

(*manasikārābhāvamātra*). For beginningless attachment to material form and the rest is not removed merely on the basis of a complete relinquishing of attention, as [occurs] in the unconscious state of attainment, etc. / Bhk 1 212.10-16: *yat punar uktam avikalpapraveśadhāranyām "amanasikārato rūpādinimittam varjayati" iti / tatrāpi prajñayā nirūpayato yo 'nu[p]alambhaḥ sa tatrāmanasikāro 'bhipreto na manasikārābhāvamātram / na hy asamjñīsamāpattyādir iva anādikāliko rūpādyabhiniveśo manasikāraparivarjanamātrāt prahīyate. D 34b2-4: rnam par mi rtog pa la 'jug pa'i gzungs las yid la mi byed pas gzugs la sogs pa'i mtshan ma spong ngo zhes gsungs pa gang yin pa de yang shes rab kyis brtags na mi dmigs pa gang yin pa de / der yid la mi byed par dgongs kyis / yid la byed pa med pa tsam ni ma yin te / 'du shes med pa'i snyoms par 'jug pa la sogs pa ltar thog ma med pa'i dus gnas gzugs la sogs pa la mngon par zhen pa'i yid la byed pa spangs pa tsam gyis spong ba ni ma yin no /*

On this passage, and more generally on *amanasikāra* in the Indo-Tibetan tradition, see Higgins.

¹⁹ Prof. K. N. Mishra of the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies has pointed out that this sense is immediately apparent to speakers of modern Indic languages such as Hindi (personal exchange). Similar expressions are found in English. Compare: 'Don't mind,' 'Mind your step,' 'I wouldn't pay it any mind,' etc.

²⁰ This two-fold sense is apparent in Higgins' discussion (2008) of the variant term *manaskāra* as it appears in the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*:

As the natural culmination of the third omni-present mental factor 'intentionality' (*cetanā*) which describes the general object-directedness of mind, *manaskāra* has the function of 'bringing to mind' or 'setting one's mind upon' (focusing on) a particular object *and* remaining involved (conceptually and affectively) with it. (Emphasis added).

²¹ It is beyond the scope of this paper to enter into a detailed discussion of the meaning of this term, which does not play a particularly prominent role in the *Bhāvanākramas*.

²² In all three *Bhāvanākramas* the two are mentioned together in the course of discussing antidotes to distractions that may come up in the process of practicing *śamatha*. (Bhk 1 208 3-5, Bhk 1 208.14-16, Bhk 2 D 48a2-a4, Bhk 3 10.8-13, Bhk 3 10.19-21).

²³ Beginning at Bhk 3 15.12 and continuing to 17.11, D62a2-64b1.

²⁴ Bhk 3 20.6-8: *yadi nāmāsau vikalpasvabhāvā tathāpi yoniśomanasikārasvabhāvatvāt, tato bhūtanirvikalpajñānodaya iti kṛtvā tajjñānārthinā sā sevanīyā / D 64a3-4: de rnam par rtog pa'i ngo bo nyid yin du zin kyang tshul bzhin du yid la byed pa'i ngo bo nyid yin pa'i phyir de las rnam par mi rtog pa'i ye shes 'byung bar 'gyur pas na ye shes de 'dod pas de la brten par bya'o /*

²⁵ But see Ruegg (64), where the author speaks of '...the fundamental factors of exact analytic investigation (*bhūtapratyavekṣa* = *yang dag pa'i so sor rtog pa*) and its culmination in

the analysis of the factors of existence (*dharmapracaya* = *chos shin tu rnam par 'byed pa*)' (Emphasis added). This would imply that the discernment of reality *precedes* the discrimination of *dharmas*.

²⁶ In the *Itivuttika* (no.16) wise attention is given the following description:

This was said by the Lord... 'Bhikkhus, in regard to internal factors, I do not perceive another single factor so helpful as wise attention to a bhikkhu who is a learner, who has not attained perfection but lives aspiring for the supreme security from bondage. Bhikkhus, a bhikkhu who wisely attends abandons what is unwholesome and develops what is wholesome.

For a bhikkhu who is a learner

There is no other thing so helpful

For reaching the highest goal

As the factor wise attention.

Wisely striving a bhikkhu may attain

The destruction of all suffering.'

The translator adds that *yoniso manasikāra* is explained in the commentaries as attending to things and situations as impermanent, unsatisfactory, without self, and foul (rather than their opposites) and avoiding fruitless speculation. Supreme security from bondage is release from the four bonds of sensual desire, desire for being, views and ignorance. (Ireland: 11-12, 93-94). Thus wise attention is an essential condition for the attainment of *nibbāna*. See note 29 below. For a fuller description of *yoniso manasikāra* in the Pāli tradition see *M 2*.

²⁷ Other possible translations for *yonisās* include 'appropriate,' 'fundamental,' 'careful,' and 'systematic.' The term is an interesting one, with mystical connotations. The term 'yonī' refers to the female organs of generation, which in the Mahāyāna context are associated with emptiness and wisdom. The suffix 'śās' indicates being 'in the manner of.' I have chosen to translate the expression as 'wise'. In this specific Buddhist context the word implies that the mental activity it qualifies is founded on a correct experiential understanding of the way things actually are (*i.e.* empty). This is *bhāvanāmayī prajñā*. In addition, because it conforms to the conclusions already reached through scripture and reason, *yonisās manasikāra* may also be seen as properly grounded in *śrutamayī* and *cintāmayī prajñā*. Finally, although this may not have been intended, such attention might be considered wise in the sense of being properly grounded in morality, which is to say, based in method. Kamalaśīla is adamant that the pursuit of wisdom without method is not a proper practice for bodhisattvas. More generally, as indicated in the preceding note, such attention can be characterized as wise in the sense that it is focused on wholesome or skillful (*kusala*) *dharmas* and not those that are unwholesome or unskillful (*akusala*).

²⁸ Such a conception of the necessity of *manasikāra* is not without precedent. See *Mahāvedalla Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikāya* 43, sections 26f. Two conditions are given for the attainment of 'signless deliverance of mind,' (*animittā ceto-vimutti*) which is identifiable as the attainment of fruition, namely, 'nonattention to all signs' (*amanasikāra*) and

‘attention to the signless element’ (*nibbāna*). *M 43.27*: ‘Friend, there are two conditions for the attainment of the signless deliverance of the mind: nonattention to all signs and attention to the signless element.’ Two further conditions are listed for the *emergence from the signless deliverance of mind*. These are ‘attention to all signs’ (*manasikāra*) and nonattention to the signless element. *M 43.29*: ‘Friend, there are two conditions for emergence from the signless deliverance of mind: attention to all signs and nonattention to the signless element.’ This inversion implies that *manasikāra* also precedes the establishment of *amanasikāra*. Note also the displacement of *nibbāna* by *sūnyatā* in the role of ‘the signless element’ in our present context.

²⁹ Bhk 2 D 49b5-b6: *gang shes rab kyis dngos po'i ngo bo nyid so sor brtags nas mi bsgom gyi / yid la byed pa yongs su spong ba tsam 'ba' zhig sgom par byed pa de'i rnam par rtog pa nam yang mi ldog cing ngo bo nyid med pa nyid rtogs (NP: rtog) par yang mi 'gyur te / shes rab kyi snang ba med pa'i phyir ro // 'di ltar "yang dag par so sor rtog pa nyid las yang dag pa ji lta ba bzhin du shes pa'i me byung na gtsubs shing gtsubs pa'i me bzhin du rtog pa'i shing sreg go" zhes bcom ldan 'das kyis bka' stsal to // Cf. Bhk 3 30.8-11, D 64a4-5.*

³⁰ Compare Gunaratana (1985: 144-145) on Buddhaghosa's understanding of *paññā* as: a mode of knowing (*jānana*) distinct from and superior to the modes of perceiving (*sañjānana*) and cognizing (*vijānana*). What distinguishes wisdom from these forms of cognition is its ability to comprehend the characteristics of impermanence, suffering and selflessness and to bring about the manifestation of the supramundane path.

³¹ Bhk 1: 211.20-212.3: *etad eva tan mahāyānam ucyate yat paramatattvadarśanam / etad eva tat paramatattvadarśanaṃ yat sarvadharmān prajñācakṣuṣā nirūpayataḥ samyagjñānāvaloke satyadarśanam / tathā cōktam sūtre "katamaṃ paramārthadarśanam / sarvadharmāṇām adarśanam / iti / D 33b5-7: de kho na dam pa mthong ba gang yin pa de nyid theg pa chen po zhes bya'o / / de kho na dam pa mthong ba de ni chos thams cad shes rab kyī mig gis brtags te yang dag pa'i ye shes kyī snang ba shar na ci yang mthong ba med pa gang yin pa'o / de skad mdo las kyang gsungs te / don dam pa mthong ba gan zhe na / chos thams cad mthong ba med pa gang yin pa'o zhes 'byung ngo /*