Two Concepts of Meditation and Three Kinds of Wisdom in Kamalaśīla’s Bhāvanākramas: A Problem of Translation

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ABSTRACT: A close reading of the three Bhāvanākramaḥ texts, written by Kamalaśīla (740–795 CE), reveals that their author was aware of two competing concepts of meditation prevalent in Tibet at the time of their composition. The two concepts of meditation, associated with the Sanskrit words bhāvanā and dhyāna, can be related respectively to the Indian and Chinese sides of the well-known debates at bSam yas. The account of the Mahāyāna path outlined in these texts implies an acceptance of the precedence of bhāvanā over dhyāna. In this paper I argue that Kamalaśīla advocated bhāvanā – a conception of meditation which encompasses non-conceptual dhyāna, but which also includes a discernment of reality (bhūta-pratyavekṣā) that is conceptual in nature. Such conceptual discernment should not be understood simply as a process of ordinary rational understanding (cintāmayī prajñā) but rather as constituting a special kind of meditative wisdom (bhāvanāmayī prajñā). A failure to recognize the subtle differences between Kamalaśīla’s employment of the terms dhyāna and bhāvanā, along with his advocacy of the latter, could easily lead to mistranslation and, with this, a basic misunderstanding of his position. In particular, it could lead to a conception of insight (vipaśyanā) that is overly intellectual in nature. Given the historically important role that these texts played in the formation of Tibetan Buddhism, the implications of such a misconception could be far-reaching. This paper attempts to clarify the key meditation terminology found in the Bhāvanākramas as well as demonstrate the rationale for using ‘meditation’ as the default translation for bhāvanā.

DIFFERENT CONCEPTS OF MEDITATION

The following pages contain an analysis of a constellation of meditation-related terms found in three polemical treatises, identically entitled Bhāvanākramaḥ (The Process of Meditation). It is not clear why their author, Kamalaśīla, wrote three texts with the same title.¹ There is considerable overlap among the three, and not

¹ The three texts were likely composed in Tibet between 792 and 794 CE, although see Taniguchi (1992) for an argument that the first Bhāvanākramaḥ was composed somewhat earlier in India.
infrequently repetition. That being said, the three treatises cover an extraordinary range of subjects, all united around the central purpose of providing guidance to new practitioners of the teachings of the Mahāyāna Sūtras.2

Historically, the Bhāvanākramas’ account of meditation has been enormously influential. Paul Williams has referred to the texts as ‘the principal systematic Indian sources for the integration of emptiness teachings into Madhyamaka meditation practice’ (Williams, 1989: 72). Elsewhere they have been described as ‘the origin of Tibetan tradition of how to meditate’ (Taniguchi, 1992: 303). This paper argues that there are, in fact, two competing concepts of meditation present in the texts. These two concepts are identifiable with two specific Sanskrit words, both of which have been commonly translated into English as ‘meditation’ – bhāvanā and dhyāna. Because Kamalaśīla does not employ these terms as synonyms, a problem arises for the modern day translator: which word, if either, should be privileged in translation as ‘meditation’? While neither can carry the same range of meanings as the English word (on which, see below), in this paper it is argued that Kamalaśīla regarded bhāvanā as normative for the practice of beginners in the way of the Mahāyāna Sutras. As such, ‘meditation’ should be its default translation. For these texts, it is potentially misleading to translate dhyāna as meditation. The issue is more than academic. Depending on the choice made, Kamalaśīla’s account of the Mahāyāna Buddhist path to Awakening will be radically altered. To that extent, our understanding of both the doctrinal and practical foundations of Tibetan Buddhism will be affected.

According to Edward Conze, ‘The first explains the doctrine of the Mahāyāna, the second how it can be meditated upon, and the third what is the result of meditation’ (1975: 177). Conze is here following a description contained in a Tibetan record cited in Tucci (1958: 40–41). The account has it that the Tibetan king, Khri Srong lde btsan, requested these explanations following Kamalaśīla’s pivotal victory in debate over a Chinese rival of the Ch’an tradition (discussed below). The ‘doctrine’ of Bhk 1 is described as that of the three kinds of wisdom (śrutamaya, cintāmayī, and bhāvanāmyai prajñā). The way of meditation of Bhk 2 is explained in light of the realization that there is only one vehicle; it is the result of this meditation that Bhk 3 is said to explain. But such categorical statements are best made with caution; all three texts contain discussions of doctrine, meditation, and its result.

2. Perhaps it is as much due to the excellence of scholarship already devoted to their study as it is to the breadth of their concern that the Bhāvanākramas tend to be among the most widely quoted of Indian Buddhist texts. Tucci has provided critical editions of the Sanskrit and Tibetan of the Bhk 1 (1958) and the Sanskrit of the Bhk 3 (1971). Of the three texts, the original Sanskrit of the Bhk 2 is lost. As well, the first folio of the Sanskrit of Bhk 1 is missing, as are the edges of many of the pages of the manuscript of Bhk 3 from which Tucci worked. All three texts are, however, fully preserved in the Tibetan Tanjur. A critical edition of the Tibetan text of Bhk 2 based on the Narthang (N), Peking (P), Derge (D), and Cone (C) editions has been prepared by K. Goshima (1983). The Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies has published an edition of the Sanskrit and Tibetan texts, which occasionally serves to clarify Tucci (Namdol, 1997). This contains a Hindi translation and Sanskrit reconstructions of Bhk 2 and the first folio of Bhk 1. I have worked mainly from the editions of Tucci, Goshima, and the Derge Tanjur dBu ma KI (22a-41b, 42a-55b, and 56a-68b respectively for the three texts). Unless otherwise noted, references are to Tucci for the Sanskrit texts and to D for the Tibetan.
The three texts contain numerous instructions for the beginner in Mahāyāna meditation. Equally, the Bhāvanākramas constitute a kind of apology or justification for a particular approach to the Buddhist path. The Tibetan tradition regards them as containing a summary of arguments employed in the refutation of a Chinese Ch‘an position being advocated at the time of the first great transmission of Buddhism to Tibet. The debate has been characterized in terms of gradualism vs. subitism (Gomez, 1987). The gradualist view, associated with the Indian side led by Kamalaśīla, held that Awakening can only be attained after a long process of training in which one deliberately cultivates certain causes and conditions conducive to its occurrence. These causes and conditions are both moral and cognitive – one must cultivate specific moral virtues as well as a specific conceptual knowledge of the nature of reality. Such cultivation (bhāvanā) is a gradual process – it takes time and has definite steps. The subitist position, represented by a Ch‘an monk (Hvashang) named Mo ho yen (Sanskrit: Mahāyāna), held that Awakening occurs suddenly, all at once. Awakening was understood as a state requiring only the practice of a non-conceptual concentration or absorption (dhyāna), wherein one’s mind is cleared from all obscuring mental activity. Attempts to cultivate specific moral virtues and views of reality were understood as counterproductive on the grounds that they accumulate karma and prolong one’s sojourn through cyclical existence.3

The contrary view, argued by Kamalaśīla, held that a particular kind of cognitive process – a ‘correct analysis’ or ‘discernment of reality’ (bhūta-pratyavekṣā) – is essential to the achievement of Awakening. Because Awakening involves a kind of knowledge (i.e. non-conceptual knowledge, nirvikalpa jñāna), and not merely concentration, it is essential to first become established not only in concentration but also in a correct conceptual knowledge, which can then function to give rise to the sought after noetic state. The principle at work here is that like arises from like: one kind of knowledge arises on the basis of another. Kamalaśīla seems to have understood his opponent as arguing on the basis of the same causal principle, but focusing on the other aspect of Awakening – its non-conceptuality. Thus,

3. Bk 3 13.15–14.1: yas tu manyate / cittāvikalpa samutthāpiteśubhāśubha-karmaśca sattvāḥ svargādikā karmaphalaṃ anuvahavantaḥ saṁsāre saṁsaraṃ / ye punar na kīmic cintayanti nāpi kīmic karma kurvanti te parinucyante saṁsārāt / tasmāna kīmic cintayitvayam / nāpi dānādikālaśacaryā kartavyā / kevalā mūrkhājanam adhiṣīyeta dānādikālaśacaryā nirdeṣeti /; D 61b1: gang zhig sems kyi 'rnam par rtog pas 'bras pa'i 'dgen mi 'dgen ba'i las 'kyi 'dag 'dubs 'gib 'dbs sems cems can 'rnam mtho 'ri la sogs pa'i 'bras bu myon zhing 'khor ba na 'khor ro / gang dag ci yang mi cems ci yang mi byed pa de dag ni 'khor ba las yongs su thar bar 'gyur ro / de lta bas na ci yang mi 'bsam mo / sbyin pa la sogs pa 'dgen mi 'phyang pa 'gzhug pa dūg las 'khrims pa bstan pa kho na yin no snyom du 'rugs shing de skad 'kyang 'srwa ba des ni 'theg po 'chen po 'thugs dag 'skyong pa yin no/; 'But some consider, "Because they are subject to positive and negative actions generated by the conceptual mind, sentient beings spin around in cyclical existence experiencing the fruits of their actions, such as heaven. But those who do not think anything nor perform any action whatsoever, they are fully liberated from cyclical existence. Therefore nothing should be thought. Nor should the skillful conduct of giving and the rest be undertaken. The skillful conduct of giving and the rest is taught only with foolish people in mind".'
as a non-conceptual state of knowledge, Awakening might be thought of as only arising on the basis of non-conceptual concentration. According to Kamalaśīla, this is a misunderstanding; non-conceptual concentration, because it lacks a cognitive dimension, can not on its own result in a state of knowledge. At the same time, however, Kamalaśīla did recognize the concentrative nature of the resulting state of nonconceptual knowledge; he therefore accepted the necessity of initially combining the one-pointed quality of concentration with the noetic quality of conceptual knowledge. The resulting state could thus be both concentrated and noetic.4

To understand Kamalaśīla’s views in more detail, I will attempt to demonstrate how he understood the logical relations obtaining between bhāvanā and dhyāna, as well as their relationships to other key terms denoting meditative states and processes. I will then attempt to demonstrate how it is that Kamalaśīla accepted as normative the concept of bhāvanā. But before entering into these topics it would perhaps be germane to say a few words about how I understand the English word ‘meditation’.

In normal English usage, and in its most general conception, when one talks of ‘meditation’, in most cases one is referring to a deliberately undertaken introspective process which is aimed at reaching a qualitatively different state of mind – usually a spiritual state of some description (e.g. communion with God) or a heightened state of awareness. The process itself is marked by concentration – either upon some aspect of the goal sought or upon the activity itself. Such concentration usually follows a technique, which can be described and practised. Although introspective, this may involve a physical aspect. Practices of meditation vary widely, including everything from visualization, repetition of verbal phrases or prayers, to the walking of labyrinths. These diverse procedures share the features of voluntariness, introspection and concentration, and are all undertaken with the aim of bringing about an altered state of consciousness or a change in spiritual condition.

It is important to note, however, that in the western intellectual tradition there exists a second and related use of the word ‘meditation’ in which many of these features are not found. In this case the word meditation is employed to refer to processes of ordinary rational thought that are seriously undertaken and concerned with topics judged to be important or profound. ‘Meditation’ in this sense is a kind of intellectual contemplation or rumination, involving neither a special technique of concentration nor the idea of achieving of an altered state of consciousness. This employment of the word is perhaps most famously exemplified

4. Thus the two opponents both asserted that an initial practice of concentration was necessary, but they disagreed as to its nature. Just as from Kamalaśīla’s perspective, Mo ho yen’s difficulty was to explain the noetic aspect of Awakening on the basis of a non-cognitive practice; from Mo ho yen’s perspective, Kamalaśīla’s difficulty would be to explain Awakening’s nonconceptuality arising on the basis of a conceptual process. In addition, as noted, Mo ho yen held that such conceptual activities were karmatic and thus counterproductive with respect to liberation.
in the title of René Descartes’ *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia* (1641). Clearly, in western culture there is a long-standing and distinct association between ‘meditation’ and ordinary discursive thought.

With these considerations in mind, we may now return our attention to the idea of meditation as found in the *Bhāvanākramas* texts. It may be remarked in passing that, in their own way, these three works of Kamalaśīla have shown themselves to be as seminal to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition as the reflections of the great French philosopher have proven to western philosophy. And the questions they raise appear equally profound. The issue we are concerned with here, namely the relations obtaining among diverse concepts of meditation, is an extraordinarily complex one. An initial listing of some of the main terms for meditation occurring within the *Bhāvanākramas* includes the following (I provide some of the more common English translations):

1. *dhyāna* – absorption, trance, concentration, meditation
2. *samādhi* – concentration, state of concentration, meditation
3. *bhāvanā* – cultivation, development, realization, actualization, meditation
4. *śamatha* – tranquility meditation, serenity, calm, calm abiding
5. *vipaśyanā* – insight meditation, insight, wisdom

It can be seen that there are, in fact, at least three Sanskrit terms commonly translated by the English word ‘meditation’, plus two that are considered kinds of meditation. In order to understand Kamalaśīla’s particular views, I will first of all briefly review and comment upon each of these.

*Dhyāna* – probably the term most commonly associated with the word ‘meditation’, this word is derived from the Sanskrit verbal root √*dhyai* (to think of, meditate upon) plus the primary affix (kṛ-pratyaya) ‘lyut’, which forms abstract, instrumental or verbal nouns. In Chinese, as is well known, the transliterated term Ch’an (Japanese: *Zen*) came to refer to a number of schools emphasizing the meditation aspect of Buddhist practice. In the original Indian context, however, the word specifically referred to a set of four successive meditative absorptions (Pāli: *jhāna*) wherein one’s mental contents are attenuated to a state of one-pointedness and equanimity free from all disturbing emotions and mental activity. Although much has been written about the *dhyānas*, for our purposes three points should be noted.

First, it is important to recognize that after the first *dhyāna*, all thought is said to have been eliminated. Both *vitarka* (relatively gross thought, as mental application) and *vicāra* (subtle thought, or examination) are absent from the second through to the fourth *dhyānas*. While some thought is present in the first *dhyāna*, this state is not defined as one in which a deliberate conceptual analysis of reality takes place.

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5. The *dhyānas* are said to be optionally followed by another sequence of four ‘formless attainments’ (*ārūpya samāpatti*) occurring on the basis of the fourth *dhyāna*. See Griffiths (1986), Cran- gle (1994: 201–7), and Gethin (1998: 184–6) for treatments of these attainments.
The second point is that Kamalaśīla subdivides the first absorption into two. We shall see that Kamalaśīla may actually have accepted the possibility of a deliberate conceptual analysis of reality occurring in the first dhyāna; if so, it might well have been the case that he particularly associated this possibility with the intermediate dhyāna. We shall return to this topic at the end of this paper. In any case, for now, it seems clear that he regarded his opponent as adhering to a general notion of dhyāna that excludes deliberate activities of conceptual analysis.

The third point to note is that the dhyānas are all said to share the quality of ekagrata or one-pointedness of mind. This quality is also said to characterize our next term, samādhi, as well as sāmatha.

Samādhi - this term is often given as a gloss for dhyāna, but its scope is generally understood to be wider than that of the four dhyānas. While it encompasses these, it also refers to other states of mental one-pointedness. For example, it includes the preliminary state of ‘the capable’ (anāgamyā – equivalent to ‘access’

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6. Bhk 1 209.2–11: esa ca cittaikāgratā uttarottarakarmanyatāsamprasyaśayogā abalamādignaṃvāsśayogaṃ ca dhyānāprayaṇamāṃvāsśayogaṃ vāvāṣā cābhavati. We shall return to this topic at the end of this paper. In any case, for now, it seems clear that he regarded his opponent as adhering to a general notion of dhyāna that excludes deliberate activities of conceptual analysis.

7. In including an intermediate stage between the first and second dhyānas, one in which vitarka is absent while vicāra remains, the account of the dhyānas found in the Bhāvānākramas appears to be following that of Vasubandhu. See Abhik viii 22d, 23d-e. Like Kamalaśīla, Vasubandhu divides the first dhyāna into two. However, according to Vasubandhu, the first dhyāna may contain either vitarka or vicāra, but not both in the same moment.
(upacāra) concentration in Theravāda Buddhism), a degree of mental focus that allows one to enter into the dhyānas proper, or else to turn one’s attention to insight (vipaśyanā) practices. The word samādhi is thus arguably the broadest Indian term used in reference to states of meditation. In the context of spiritual practice, it is understood to exclude non-virtuous states of concentration, such as those an assassin and so forth. It usually denotes concentration as a mental state of nondistraction. As well, the word is sometimes used to refer to the processes that give rise to such mental states. Derived from the verbal root √dhā (to put, place, set, join, unite) in combination with the prefixes ‘sam’ (together) and ‘ā’ (around) and the masculine suffix ‘ki’, the sense of samādhi is one of ‘placing (that which is) around together’, or simply, ‘unification’.

Bhāvanā - derived from the causative form of the verbal root √bhū, (√bhū + nic + either lyu or lyut), the word bhāvanā literally means ‘causing to be’, ‘making become’, or ‘giving rise to’. Hence among its most common translations we find ‘cultivation’, ‘development’, ‘realization’, and even ‘actualization’. These translations are etymologically more precise than ‘meditation’; in addition, the first two have the extra implication of a gradual progression toward a state that is sought.

Unlike the term samādhi, one does not properly speak of ‘attaining’ a state of bhāvanā; on the contrary, this word exclusively refers to processes through which one brings particular states into being. It should be noted, however, that translations such as ‘cultivation’ and ‘development’, while capturing this primary signification, do not necessarily imply samādhi. Outside of the context of spiritual practice, the word bhāvanā obviously can have a wider, non-technical sense that includes deliberately giving rise to things not necessarily characterized by concentration, nor indeed consistent with virtue. For example, the activities of watering a garden, cooking a meal, and plotting an act of revenge can all be considered as instances of bhāvanā in a broader sense of ‘cultivation’. In the context of spiritual practice, however, this word refers to virtuous efforts, those that further the cause of liberation by generating positive states (dharmas) characterized by concentration (samādhi).

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8. See e.g. Visuddhimagga III 2–3, where the idea of a process is captured in its gloss: samadhāna. (Note again the kṛt-pratyaya ‘lyuṭ’ in a word indicating a process). The two uses of the word can be seen clearly in connection with the classical eightfold path, where samādhi not only appears as one of the eight aspects of the path, namely, right concentration (samyak samādhi), but also as the label for the set of three aspects that together constitute the meditation component of the path: right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. The term is thus used to designate the meditation (samādhi) component of the three reliances of morality, meditation, and wisdom (śīla, samādhi, and prajñā), into which the eightfold path may be subdivided. On such use of the term samādhi to designate a list of items (though not necessarily items related to meditation) see Skilton (2002).

9. According to Vasubandhu, bhāvanā is divisible into four types corresponding to a classical fourfold division of right effort – efforts for the arising of non-arisen pure dharmas, for the growth of already arisen pure dharmas, for the non-arising of non-arisen impure dharmas and for the destruction of already arisen impure dharmas. Abhik 1081.1-5, 22–31. For a detailed treatment of the classical Nikāya account see Gethin (1992: 69–80). In terms of this term’s relation to
Śamatha: in the Buddhist tradition bhāvanā is generally understood to be divisible into the two subcategories of tranquillity (śamatha) and insight (vipaśyanā). Kamalāśīla accepts this division. The term śamatha (Pāli samatha) is derived from the verbal root śam (to be quiet, to cease, to rest). The principal significations of śamatha are those of calmness and the capacity to remain continuously focused on one object of meditation. Thus the cultivation of tranquillity brings about states of concentration and calm, such as the dhyānas. With respect to Awakening, the function of śamatha is to stabilize the mind, thereby making vipaśyanā possible.

Vipaśyanā: this term is the Buddhist hybrid Sanskrit word corresponding to the Pāli vipassanā. It is derived from the verbal root vipas ‘to see’, plus the prefix vi which can have the senses of ‘apart, asunder’ and ‘different, distinct’. The resulting sense is one of ‘seeing into’ or ‘discerning’. Hence ‘insight’ is the usual translation for this term. In general, vipaśyanā is understood to refer to observational and analytic processes that lead to a knowledge of reality.

In the Bhāvanākramas, vipaśyanā is specifically identified with a technical term, namely, ‘the discernment of reality’ (bhūta-pratyavekṣā). As Kamalāśīla quotes from the Sūtras, ‘Tranquillity is one-pointedness of mind; insight is the discernment of reality’. The function of vipaśyanā is to perceive the elements of reality (dharmas) as they truly are. If the effect of śamatha is to enable vipaśyanā, it is vipaśyanā that allows for non-conceptual knowledge to occur. And on this basis Awakening is gradually achieved.

By the power of tranquillity the mind becomes steady on its object, like a lamp [burning] in a place without wind. By insight, the light of correct

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10. Bhk 2 D46b1–2: rnal ’byor pas ni sgom pa’i dus thams cad du nya dang sha la sogs pa spang zhing mi mthun pa ma yin pa dang / zas tshod zin par bza’ bar bya’ o // de ltar byang chub sems dpa’ zhi gnas dang lhag mthong gi tshogs mtha’ dag bsags pa des bsog pa la ‘jug par bya’ o // ‘The yogin, forsaking meat and that which is not incompatible (with the scriptures), in this manner, bodhisattvas who have accumulated all the conditions of tranquillity and insight (zhi gnas dang lhag mthong gi tshogs, śamatha-vipaśyanā-saṃbhūra) should enter into meditation’.

11. Plus the kṛṣ-pratya’ya ‘athac’. See Pāṇini 3.3.92. Thanks to Sanjay Kumar Shastri of McGill University for clarifying the derivations of samādhi and śamatha.

12. Bhk 3 3.1–4: tatra śamathaḥ cittaikāgrataḥ / vipaśyanāḥ bhūtapratya’vekṣeti samkṣepāḍ āryaratnameghādau bhagavatā Śamathaviipaśyanayor laksanam uktam /; D 56b3–4: de la mādor na zhi gnas ni sams rtses gcig pa nyid do / lhag mthong ni yang dag pa la rtog pa’o / zhes bcom ldan ’das kyi’ phags pa dkon mchog sprin la sogs pa las zhi gnas dang lhag mthong gi mthsan nyid bka’ stsal lo /; ‘Thus in the noble Ratnamēgha and elsewhere the Bhagavān concisely stated the definition of tranquillity and insight, “Tranquillity is one-pointedness of mind, insight is the discernment of reality”. Also quoted at Bhk 2 D 47a2.
knowledge emerges on the basis of accurately realizing the true nature of dharmas. And on that basis all obscuration is removed, just as the night by the dawning of the sun.13

The difference between tranquillity and insight can also be understood in terms of the application of concepts to the object of the meditation. Adhering to the Śaṅkhāyana Sūtra, Kamalaśīla asserts that śamatha is nonconceptual (nirvikalpa) and that vipaśyānā is conceptual (savikalpa).

[T]he Bhagavān taught four realities as meditation objects for yogis: a) a reflection without conceptualization b) a reflection accompanied by conceptualization c) the limit of things and d) the perfection of purpose. In this context, when by means of tranquillity one has committed oneself to a reflection of all dharmas or to a form like that of the Buddha, that which is depended upon is called a reflection without conceptualization (nirvikalpa-pratibimbakam). It is called without conceptualization here because of an absence of concepts determining the real object-meaning (bhūtārtha). And it is called a reflection because it is depended upon, having committed oneself to a reflection of dharmas as they have been learned and understood. When, by means of insight, the yogin analyses (vīcārayati) that very reflection in order to realize reality, then it is called a reflection accompanied by conceptualization (savikalpa-pratibimbakam) on account of the presence there of a concept determining reality (tattva), which is the characteristic of insight.14

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13. Bhk 3 1.10–14: śamathabala svālambane citam aprakampyaḥ bhavati nīvātasātmāprādipavat / vipaśyanāyā yathāvad dharmanatattvāvagamāt samyagjñānālokaḥ samutpadyate / tataḥ sakalam āvarṇaṃ prahīyate / andhakāravād āloka-dāyāt / D 56a2–3: zhi gnas kyi stobs kyis ni mar me rlung med pa na gnas pa bzhin du dmiogs pa las sens mi gyo bar ‘gyur ro / lhag mthong gis mun par nī ma shar bza bzhin du chos kyis de kha no na ji lta ba bzhin du rab tu rtsogs pas yang dag pa'i shes rab kyis nанг ba 'byung ste / sgrib pa mtha dag spong bar ‘gyur ro /.

14. Bhk 3 1.14–2.5: / ata eva bhagavatā cātvāryā ālambanavastūni yogināṁ nirdhiṣṭāni / nirvikalpaprātibimbakam / savikalpaprātibimbakam / vastuparyantatā / kāryaparinisṭatti ca / tatra śamathena yat sarvadharmapratibimbakam buddhādhiśīlām ca dādhiśīlāmbyate tan nirvikalpaprātibimbakam ucyate / tatra bhūtārthanirūpānvikalpābhāvān nirvikalpakaṃ ucyate / yathāśrutodgṛhitānāṃ ca dāñcāmāṃ prātibimbakamadhimucyāṃbyate iti kṛtvā pratibimbakam ucyate / tad eva pratibimbakam yadd vipaśyanāyā viśva-yati yogi tattvādhiṣṭāmāṃ tadā savikalpaprātibimbakam ucyate / tattvānirūpānvikalpasya vipaśyanālaśāsnaṃ tatra samudbhavāt /; D 56a3–7: de lta bas na bcom ldan 'das kyis rnal 'byor pa rnam kyi dmiogs pa'i dngos po bzhin bstan te / rnam par mi rtag pa'i gzung brnyan dang / rnam par rtag pa dang bcas pa'i gzung brnyan dang / dngos po'i mtha dang / dgos paongs su grub po'o / de la zhi gnas kyis na chos thams cad kyi gzung brnyan gsin pa dang / sangs rgyas kyi gzung la sogs pa la mos nas dmiogs pa ste / de ni rnam par mi rtag pa'i gzung brnyan zhes bya'o / de la yang dang pa'i don la rnam par rtag pa med pas na de rnam par mī rtag pa ches bya'o / ji lta thos pa dang ji lti zin pa'i chos rnam kyi gzung brnyan zhes bya'o / rnal 'byor pas de kha no'i don rtag pa dang bca'i phyir gi tshe lhag mthong gis gzung brnyan de ni lphyod pa de'i tse lhag mthong gi mtshan nyid de kha na la rtag pa'i rnam par rtag pa de na yod pas na rnam par rtag pa dang bcas pa'i gzung brnyan zhes bya'o /.
Thus, according to Kamalāśīla, in vipaśyāna concepts (vikalpa) are deliberately applied when one analyses (vicārayati) the meditation object. Kamalāśīla’s use of the verbal form, vicārayati, can be taken to indicate the fact that he considered a kind of subtle thought (vicāra) to be present in vipaśyāna. If this is so, it raises the question as to Kamalāśīla’s views regarding the compatibility of vipaśyāna and dhyāna.

Before addressing this question directly, it would be prudent to investigate Kamalāśīla’s understanding of the logical relations obtaining among the other key meditation terms. An important passage that captures these relations can be found at the opening of the third Bhāvanākramaḥ:

Homage to Tārā! The Bhāvanākramaḥ is related in brief for those who are beginners in the way of the Mahāyāna Sūtras. In that context, even if the samādhi of bodhisattvas was taught by the Bhagavan to be limitless, by way of the (four) immeasurables and all the rest, nevertheless all samādhīs are subsumed under tranquillity and insight. Therefore, precisely that path which carries the union of tranquillity and insight is related.15

There are many points made in this brief passage. First, the universe of discourse is defined: as we have noted, the text is specifically addressing the spiritual practice of beginners who wish to become proficient in the way set out in the Mahāyāna Sūtras. Secondly, for our purposes, we must notice that every samādhi or state of concentration is here said to be included under the rubric of tranquillity and insight. It is notable that the division of tranquillity and insight is made among samādhīs or states of concentration, and not within bhāvanā as such. Given the fact that bhāvanā is also divisible into tranquillity and insight, this consideration suggests a conception of samādhi as coextensive with bhāvanā within the intended universe of discourse for these texts. Assuming for the moment that this is so, we can imagine Kamalāśīla’s working understanding of the relationship between the terms as follows. Like the concepts of lake and lakeshore, or parent and child, the concepts of tranquillity and insight are coextensive, this consideration suggests a conception of samādhi as coextensive with bhāvanā within the intended universe of discourse for these texts. Assuming for the moment that this is so, we can imagine Kamalāśīla’s working understanding of the relationship between

15. Bhāvanākramaḥ: 3.2–6: namas tārayai/mahāyānasūtrāntanayapravṛttānām samkṣepato bhāvanākramaḥ kathaye / tatra yady api bodhisattvānām aparimito‘pramāṇādibheneda bhagavatā samādhir upadīṣṭah, tathāpi samathavipaśyānābhivyāṃ sarve samādhiyayo vyūpā iti / sa eva samathavipaśyānā-yugamaddhavāhi mārgas tāvat kathaye / D 56b6–57a2: ‘jām dpal gzhon nur gyur pa la phyag ‘tshal lo / theg pa chen po mdo sde’i tshul la zhus pa rnam kyi phyir bsgom pa’i rim pa mdor brjod par bya’o / de la bcom ldan ‘das kyi byang chub sms dpā’ rnam kyi ting nge ’dzin tha dad pa tshad med dpag tu med pa la sogs pa bstan du zin kyang / zhi gnas dang lhag mthong gnyis kyi s kyis ting nge ’dzin thams cad la khyab pa na zhi gnas dang lhag mthong zun du ’brel pa ‘jug pa’i lam de nyid brjod par bya’o ./

16. That bhāvanā is a term principally used for meditative processes while samādhi is a term principally used to indicate meditative states, as well as processes. If this is so, then Kamalāśīla’s working understanding of the relationship between
samādhi and bhāvanā is as follows: any instance of bhāvanā implies samādhi and any instance of samādhi implies bhāvanā (Bh if and only if S). In effect, what this means is that we cannot conceive one without also implying the other. (It does not mean that every proposition that is true of the one is true of the other).

Given this understanding, we may now return to the question of Kamalaśīla’s understanding of the relationship between dhīyana and vipaśyanā. We can approach this topic initially by asking how our author may have regarded the relationship between dhīyana and bhāvanā. While Kamalaśīla nowhere comments directly on this issue, given the analysis just made, samādhi can be seen as a kind of ‘bridge term’ linking his conceptions of dhīyana and bhāvanā. By recalling the relationship between samādhi and dhīyana, discussed earlier, a logical structure begins to emerge. The four dhīyānas, it will be remembered, are all specific forms of meditative concentration (samādhi). Thus any instance of dhīyana is also an instance of samādhi (If Dh then S). The reverse, however, is not the case; we have seen that samādhi is the wider term, encompassing some forms of concentration not included in the four dhīyānas. From this it follows that while dhīyana implies bhāvanā (If Dh then Bh), the reverse (If Bh then Dh) is not the case. There are some instances of bhāvanā where dhīyana is not involved.

With these considerations in mind, we can view our question concerning the interrelationship of meditation terms in the Bhāvanākramas as a kind of dilemma of translation. If, on the one hand, we translate dhīyana as meditation, then this would open the door to the logical possibility that some forms of bhāvanā would not be properly conceived of as meditation for these texts. This would be consistent with a view of bhāvanā as ‘cultivation’ in the wider, non-technical sense mentioned above. Some instances of bhāvanā would not have been considered by Kamalaśīla as involving that concentration or one-pointedness of mind which, in the Buddhist tradition, is the hallmark of meditative states of consciousness. In particular, this way of understanding the texts opens up the possibility that the vipaśyanā component of bhāvanā might have been conceived as a kind of complimentary intellectual process of logical reasoning (yukti) that is not fundamentally meditative in nature. Vipaśyanā might not have been understood as a form of meditative concentration in the technical sense of one pointedness of mind. According to this way of thinking, the term ‘meditation’ would be restricted to states of samādhi (including the dhīyānas) in which there is no deliberate discursive activity.  

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17 This way of reading the Bhāvanākramas would emphasize the continuity of Kamalaśīla’s thought with that of the Buddhist epistemological tradition going back to Dignāga. Hayes (1988: 168) and Prévèreau (1994: 33) have both suggested that cintāmayi prajñā is identified as a kind of vipaśyanā meditation by Dignāga (c. 480–540). According to Prévèreau, ‘Yasomitra suggests that vipaśyanā is synonymous with prajñā (AKIV:14) so that there is not only the insight brought...
This understanding, however, raises a problem. If vipaśyanā, as a process of conceptual analysis, is not understood as meditative in nature, this would appear to be at odds with Kamalaśīla’s acceptance of the subdivision of samādhi into non-conceptual śamatha and conceptual vipaśyanā. We would be forced to conclude that Kamalaśīla’s account is inconsistent.

If, on the other hand, bhāvanā is translated as ‘meditation’, then the process of vipaśyanā will necessarily be understood as meditative in nature. However, the nature of vipaśyanā as a mental process that is at once concentrative and analytic will be problematic. How can the mind remain focused on one point and engage in conceptual analysis at the same time? On this understanding, Kamalaśīla’s account would appear to be unintelligible.

So how do we decide? In order to address this issue, I will discuss Kamalaśīla’s ideas in light of a fundamental conceptual paradigm upon which the Bhāvanākramas are based. I will then argue that if we wish to take this deep structure of Indian thought seriously, the best term to translate as ‘meditation’ is bhāvanā. On this account, Kamalaśīla’s conception of vipaśyanā would be one of a meditative process, rather than one of ordinary logical reasoning.

THREE KINDS OF WISDOM

The arguments found in the Bhāvanākramas rest upon a deep cultural presupposition that there exist three basic kinds of wisdom or learning (prajñā) – those associated with study, thinking, and meditation (śrutamayī prajñā, cintāmayī prajñā, and bhāvanāmayī prajñā). This paradigm constitutes one of India’s oldest and most fundamental ways of conceiving the process of spiritual practice. It is already mentioned in the Pāli Canon and later in Buddhaghosa’s Visuddhimagga and Vasubandhu’s Abhidharmadīkṣa. Although conceptions of its scope and place on

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18. For recent treatments, see Balagangadhara (2005: 1005–7) and especially, for Vasubandhu and Kamalaśīla, Nichols (2005).

19. See Dīgha Nikāya III 219; Vism XIV, 14: 438. Interestingly, what appears to be a parallel version of the same schema is to be found in the Bhadārānyaka Upaniṣad, where the terminology differs but the general threefold structure is clearly identifiable B.U. II 4.5: ātmā va are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyaḥ mantavyaḥ nidhīśīśitavyaḥ / maitreyī ātmano vāre darśanena śravaṇena mātyā vijñānena ātmano vāre maitreyin nityaḥ sarvaṃ viditam //: ‘You see, Maitreyī – it is one’s self (ātman) which one should see and hear, and on which one should reflect and concentrate. For by seeing and hearing one’s self, and by reflecting and concentrating on one’s self, one gains the knowledge of this whole world’ (trans. in Olivelle, 1996: 28–9). See also B.U. IV 5.6 (69–70). I am grateful to Christine Fillion for giving me these references. See Fillion (2004).
the Buddhist path vary, among western students of Buddhism this prototype has
today become so generally accepted as to border on the platitudinous rather than
the profound. Its significance, however, may not have always been fully appreci-
ated. When examined, this apparently simple schema yields some rather curious
and intriguing implications. Here we shall begin our examination with one of its
early formulations – the account found in Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakoṣa*:

(The wisdom) arisen from study (*śrūtamayī*) is a certitude born from the
authority of a qualified person (*āpta-vacana-prāmāṇyajāta*); the wis-
dom arisen from thinking (*cintāmayī*) is born from the profound reflec-
tion of reasoning (*yukti-nidhyānajā*); the wisdom arisen from *bhāvanā*
(*bhāvanāmayī*) ... is born from concentration (*samādhijā*).20

The account given by Vasubandhu regards the three kinds of wisdom as pro-
gressive – the wisdom arisen from thinking basing itself on the wisdom arisen
from study, and the wisdom arisen from *bhāvanā* basing itself on that arisen from
thinking.21

Kamalaśīla describes the wisdom of thinking as a process in which one
disentangles two kinds of scriptural statement, the *nīcārtha* and the *neyārtha*.
This important hermeneutical distinction is a tool developed by Buddhists in
order to classify scriptural statements as respectively definitive or provisional in

20. Abhk 892.3–4: *āpta-vacana-prāmāṇyajātaniścayā śrūtamayī, yuktinidhyānajā cintāmayī, samādhijā bhāvanāmayī* ...

studied, he thinks. Having thought correctly, he engages in bhāvanā. Having relied on the wis-
dom arisen from study of one in samādhi, (the wisdom) arisen from thinking is born. Having
relied on (the wisdom) arisen from thinking, (the wisdom) arisen from bhāvanā is born’.

It is important to notice that Vasubandhu interprets the suffix (*kārma-dharma-prataya*) -*maya* in a very
specific way, namely, as indicating a cause (*hetu*) and thus having a sense of ‘arisen from’ or
‘transformation of’. The idea of ‘cause’ appears to be intended here in the sense of a *preceding*,
effective cause. Abhk 892.4–5: tadyathā - annamayāḥ prānāḥ, trñamayyo gāva iti / : ‘Vital breaths
are the result of food, cows are the result of grass’. However, it is also normal to understand
the suffix more in the sense of a *present*, material cause meaning ‘made of’, ‘consisting of’, or even
‘having the nature (svabhāva) of’. See Pāṇini 4.3.82 ff.

The ambiguity here may be understood to imply another important ambiguity: that between
‘state’ and ‘process’. If we accept the understanding of -*maya* as indicating a preceding efect-
cause, then the wisdoms associated with study, thinking and bhāvanā are more readily con-
ceived ‘statically’ as results, which is to say as *states* of knowledge that have arisen. On the other
hand, if we take the suffix to indicate a cause in the sense of a present material cause (‘consisting
in’, ‘having the nature of’) then the three kinds of wisdom may also be interpreted in a more
‘dynamic’ sense, as processes. The suffix -*maya* is ambiguous and lends itself to being inter-
preted in either one of the two senses noted, depending on context. Another way of making the
same point would be to say that it can function analogously to either a *pañcāmi tatpurūṣa* (ablative
determinative) or a *karmadhārya* compound. On the latter interpretation, wisdom would
be identified with the very processes of studying, thinking and bhāvanā, not with the results
of these processes. It appears to me that Kamalaśīla’s understanding shifts between these two
conceptions. I therefore translate -*maya* in an open ended manner, analogous in meaning to a
śaṣṭhī tatpurūṣa – i.e. the wisdom of thinking.
meaning. For the Madhyamaka tradition, the distinction is cashed out in terms of their reference: definitive statements are those that pertain to ultimate truth (i.e. variously anutpāda, śūnyatā, parama-tattva, tathatā, pudgala-dharma-nairatmya, etc.), provisional statements refer to the conventional (Thurman, 1978: 26, 32–4). According to Kamalāśīla’s account, it is the task of the wisdom of thinking to identify which statements refer to the real object or meaning (bhūta, i.e. nītartha) by means of that (wisdom of thinking), one should realize (bhāvayet) it, not that which is unreal (abhūta i.e. neyārtha).22

Thus Kamalaśīla’s discussion of the wisdom of bhāvanā details the process for experientially realizing the conclusions regarding ultimate reality that have already been reached through the wisdom of thinking. It is intriguing to observe that the same verbal root √bhū lies at the basis of both bhāvanā and the word we have here translated as ‘real’, bhūta.

We should also notice another important conceptual link made by Kamalaśīla himself in this context: that between bhāvanā and another term derived from √bhū, namely, anubhāva, ‘experience’ (literally, ‘following the real’). In the first Bhāvanākramaḥ, Kamalāśīla commences his discussion of bhāvanāmayī prajñā with the statement, ‘Experience (anubhāva) belongs to those who practice’.23 This kind of experiential wisdom can be seen to depend on and encompass the other two kinds of wisdom. One ‘realizes’ or ‘meditates on’ the conclusions already reached by thinking. What it means to realize or meditate in this way is a rather subtle question. While it definitely includes a conceptual dimension, it also appears to be different from a simple case of thinking deeply about some profound topic. The wisdom of bhāvanā is conceived as having a ‘direct’ character, it is ‘experiential’ – this is what distinguishes it from the mere wisdom of thinking (cintāmayī
prajñā). It is an experiential process of discerning reality, one that occurs in a concentrated state (samādhi).

In the Buddhist context, direct experience possesses an epistemologically privileged position; it is considered indubitable in a way that conclusions reached through reasoning alone are not. Here the two forms of wisdom may be contrasted as ‘thinking through’ what one has studied (cintāmāyi prajñā) versus actually ‘going through’ or concentratedly ‘experiencing’ the reality of what one has already thought through (bhāvanāmayi prajñā). In the third Bhāvanākramaḥ, Kamalaśīla makes this point using an analogy:

And whatever is known through the wisdom of study and thinking is itself to be realized through the wisdom of bhāvanā (bhāvanāmayi prajñā, nothing else. (For example), it is like a horse running along a previously indicated running track. Therefore the discernment of reality (bhūta-pratyaveksā) is to be undertaken.24

Thus Kamalaśīla maintains that bhāvanāmayi prajñā is required for Awakening and that this form of wisdom constitutes a more direct realization than cintāmāyi prajñā. From this he concludes that the ‘discernment of reality’ (bhūta-pratyaveksā) should be undertaken. It will be recalled that this ‘discernment of reality’ is explicitly identified by Kamalaśīla with insight (vipaśyanā). Thus it seems that bhāvanāmayi prajñā, conceived as a process for realizing the true nature of reality, can here be especially identified with one branch of the well-known two-branch schema of bhāvanā: samatha and vipaśyanā.

As the most profound of the three kinds of wisdom, bhāvanāmayi prajñā is identifiable with insight par excellence. Given this fact it would seem reasonable to translate bhāvanā as ‘meditation’ in the context of these texts. The problem with translating dhyāna as ‘meditation’ is that Kamalaśīla’s opponent is portrayed as adhering to a conception of dhyāna that does not include processes of bhūta-pratyaveksā. While Kamalaśīla himself may have accepted the idea that vipaśyanā can occur in the first dhyāna, his opponent is portrayed as definitely not accepting any such conjunction.

How then are we to understand the relation between the two concepts of meditation for these texts? The answer is that bhāvanā is best conceived as the broader term: bhāvanā includes dhyāna – a term which is principally associated with non-conceptual meditation – but it is not exhausted by it. If this is so, then dhyāna would perhaps be translated as ‘absorption’, or as some other term suggestive of its status as a subspecies of meditation. After all, one would not normally wish to translate ‘pomme’ as ‘fruit’!

We can see that the question of the best Sanskrit equivalent for ‘meditation’ in the Bhāvanākramas is not unrelated to the debate between Kamalaśīla and Mo ho yen. It is perhaps not without reason that these three texts were so repetitively entitled ‘The Process of Bhāvanā’. Bhāvanā is a term for processes that include the development of wisdom through concentrated conceptual activity. In the Bhāvanākramas, Kamalaśīla portrays his opponent as adhering to a conception of dhyāna that excludes deliberate conceptual activity. Kamalaśīla’s charge against his Ch’an rival consisted precisely in the claim that he failed to understand the necessity of conceptual activity in the achievement of Awakening. As an advocate of dhyāna, Mo ho yen was viewed as interpreting Awakening as an accomplishment achieved simply by ceasing all mental activity.25 But according to Kamalaśīla, it is only through the particular conceptual activity that is the discernment of reality (bhūta-pratyavekṣā, vipaśyāna, prajñā-bhāvanā) that nonconceptual knowledge or gnosis (nirvikalpa-jñāna) can arise.26

While Kamalaśīla’s criticisms of Mo ho yen are centred upon the idea of knowledge (jñāna), Mo ho yen’s critique of Kamalaśīla can be viewed as focusing on the idea of action (karma). It is the deliberate, volitional nature of the conceptual activities enjoined by Kamalaśīla that he objects to. Volitional activity is precisely that which binds sentient beings to the wheel of rebirth. As such, it is counterproductive. This would seem to be the crux of the disagreement. For Kamalaśīla, some actions are necessary to the achievement of Awakening.

If, then, bhāvanā is to be considered the broader term for meditation in these texts, and if vipaśyāna is a kind of bhāvanā that is necessary for Awakening, we

25. This doctrine is ascribed to the Ājīvakas. Bhk 3 20.14–16: yac cāpy ucyate / na kimcit kuśalādikarma kartavyam iti / tatraivaivandadā karmakṣayān muktiḥ ity ājīvakavādābhypsagamo bhavet /; D 64b1 4: yathā baga la sogs pa’i las ci yang mi bya’o zhes zer ba de ni de skad smra bas las nas grol bar ‘gyur ro zhes ma stegs can kun tu tshol ba’i smra ba khas blang par ‘gyur ro /: ‘Now as for what is also said – that not a single action, skillful or otherwise, should be performed – those who speak thus would here be accepting the doctrine of the Ājīvakas, that is, liberation on the basis of karma’s destruction’. See also Bhk 3 30.8–11.

26. When the practitioner reaches the point of comprehending emptiness nonconceptually, this constitutes ‘the limit of things’ mentioned above (Bhk 3 2.8–10; D 56a7–b1) and the arising of the first stage and transcendent path of the bodhisattva. On this basis, gradually but inevitably the bodhisattva’s purpose is perfected and the omniscience of Buddhahood is achieved. Quoting from the Ratnakūta, the ultimate justification for the practice of insight is dramatically explained. Bhk 2 D 49b5–b6: gang shes rab kyi dngos dngos po’i ngo bo nyid so sbrtags nas ni bsom gyi / yid la byed pa yongs su spong ba tsam ‘ba’ zhih sgom par byed pa de’i rnam par rtog pa nam yang mi ldod (NP rtog) cing ngo bo nyid pa nyid (NP omit nyid) rtogs (Goshima follows NP: rtog) par yang mi ‘gyur te / shes rab kyi snang ba med pa’i phyir ro /’ d’ltar ‘yang dag par so sbrtags pa nyid las yang dag pa ji la ba bzhin na shes pa’i me byung na gtsubs shing gtsubs pa’i me bzhin da rtog pa’i shing sreg go” zhes bcom ldan ‘das kyi bka’ stsal to /: ‘Someone who only cultivates the mere abandonment of mental activity, but who does not meditate having analysed the nature of entities with wisdom, will never get rid of concepts and will not come to realize the absence of inherent nature – on account of the absence of the light of wisdom. So it is said by the Illustrious One, “When the fire of knowing reality as such arises from the very discernment of reality, it incinerates the wood of concepts, just as the fire of firesticks rubbed together [consumes the sticks themselves]”’. See also Bhk 3 30.8–11.
may well ask what precisely its undertaking was thought to involve. Here I can only give a brief indication of Kamalaśīla’s conception, in relation to other meditation terminology already discussed.

First of all, the process is described as being undertaken while actually abiding in a state of śamatha. ‘Having renounced all obscurations, one who wants pure knowledge to arise must cultivate wisdom while abiding in tranquillity’.27

Similar considerations apply to samādhi. Quoting from the Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra:

… [H]aving abandoned mental distractions, he inwardly discerns those very same previously considered dharmas as reflections in the sphere of concentration (T. ting nge ’dzin, Skt. samādhi). In this manner, discriminating the meaning of what is to be known in those reflections in the sphere of concentration, thoroughly discriminating, completely considering, completely investigating, forbearing, accepting, classifying, looking and knowing – That is called insight. So it is that the bodhisattva is skilled in insight.28

Thus while Kamalaśīla’s views regarding the compatibility of vipaśyana with both samādhi and śamatha are clear, the question still remains as to whether he regarded its conjunction with dhyāna as possible. In the Bhāvanākramas the two terms are never mentioned in the same breath. In spite of this fact, my suggestion is that Kamalaśīla did regard them as compatible and that, given the presence of thought (vitarka-vicāra) within the first dhyāna, it is precisely this meditative state that theoretically allows the two to come together. Indeed, among the dhyānas, this conjunction would have been considered possible only in the first dhyāna – since thought is absent from the second to the fourth dhyānas. In particular, it may well have been the higher, intermediate division of the first absorption (dhyānāntara) that Kamalaśīla associated with the possibility of the practice of insight meditation. It will be recalled that it is in this division that gross thought (vitarka) is absent while subtle thought (vicāra) remains. If we associate the activity of subtle thought with the verbal form vicārayati, employed by Kamalaśīla in

27. Bhk 2 D 44b7–45a1: de lta bas na sgrib pa ‘mtha dag spangs nas yongs su dag pa’i ye shes ‘byung bar ‘dod pas zhi gnas la gnas shing shes rab bsom par bya’o //. While basic, such a notion has been taken by some scholars as suggesting a conceptual tension in Buddhist meditation theory. How can conceptual analysis occur in a state of one-pointed meditation? According to Griffiths, it led to various attempts to regard insight as occurring in ‘liminal states’ between the dhyānas. This difficulty may well provide some explanation for the postulation of an intermediate dhyāna. (1983: 245–51, 285–7; also see Vetter, 1988: xxv–xxvii).

describing the practice of insight according to the Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra, the connection would be made.  

The other possibility, as discussed, is that insight be understood in terms of

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29. Indeed this would seem to be confirmed by Kamalaśīla’s employment of the same verb in describing the experiential process of conceptual analysis outlined in the LAñkāvatāra Sūtra. In editing the Sanskrit text of Bhk 1, Tucci created a separate section for this description, No. 16, which he entitled ‘Method of meditation according to the LAñkāvatāra; vicāra on the dharmas (no object, no subject), etc’. This section occurs immediately following Kamalaśīla’s discussion of dhyāna; both are set in the overall context of bhāvanāyāṃ prajñā. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to deal extensively with Kamalaśīla’s account of the LAñkāvatāra Sūtra, a brief excerpt should suffice to demonstrate the experiential quality of the language he employs. After having stabilized the mind on the five aggregates as a meditation object (Bhk 1 206.7–15), the analytic process is described as commencing with an analysis of dharmas with material form: Bhk 1 210.16–211.4: prathamāṃ yogī ye rūpino dharmā bāhūrthathayā pariṇāmānī parikalpitā teṣu tvaṃ vicārayet / kim ete vijñānānī anye, āhosūd vijñānānī evatāt tathā prabhūtā, yathā svapnāvasthāyāṃ iti / tatra vijñānānī bhūti paramānūsaḥ vicārayet / paramānūsam bhūgaṣaḥ pratyavekṣamāṇāḥ yogī tān arthān na samanupāsyaḥ / tasyāsamanupāsatvā evam bhavati / cittamātraṃ evaśit sarvam na punar bāhyo ‘rtho vidyate / tad evam / ‘cittamātraṃ samārhūya bāhyam arthām na kalyaṃt / rūpānāvikālpaṃ tajyad ityārthah / tēṣām upaśaṃyālakṣaṇarūpānīm vicārayed anupalabdheḥ / evam rapino dharmān vibhāvyārūpino vibhāvyayet /; 33a4–34b1: thag mar nval ‘byor paṃchos gzaṅs can gan dga’ gzaṅs la sogs pa phyi ro gti don du gzhon dag gis brtags pa’m de dag la ci ‘di dag nram par shes pa las gzhon zhiṅ yin nam /’on te nram par shes pa’m de nyid de ltag snang ste / rmi lam gnas skabs ji lta ba bzhin nam zhes dpayad par bya’o / de la nram par shes pa las phyi rol pa rdl phra rab tu bshig ste / rdl phra rab nrams kyung cha shas kis so sor brtags na mval ‘byor paṃchos de dag mi mthong nge / de dag ma mthong bas ‘di snyam du ‘di dag thams ca mni sems tsam ste phyi ro gti don mde do snyam du sems so /‘di ltar / sems tsam la ni rab brten nas / phyi ro gti don la ma mtag go / zhes de skad ‘byung ba ni mchos gzaṅs can la nram par rtag pa spong ba’o zhes bya’i thu tshig go / dngi s grug ba’i mthshan nyid du gyur pa de dag nram par dpayad na mdkīs pa’i phyir ro / de ltarchos gzaṅs can nrams nram par bshig ngs gzaṅs can ma yin pa nram par bshig bya par ste /’First of all the yogin should analyse (vicārayet, T. dpayad 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 dreamstate?’ In that regard [i.e. if the position held is that they have a nature] outside of consciousness, he should break them down into atoms (paramāṇūsa vicārayet, T. rdl phra rab tu bshig ste). And discerning (pratyavekṣamāṇaḥ, T. so sor brtags pa) those atoms by way of parts, the yogin does not see (na samanupāṣyati, T. mi mthong) those things. Not seeing (them), he thinks: ‘All this is indeed mind-only, an external object does not exist’. Therefore thus: ‘Having ascended to mind-only, one would not imagine an external object’. It is for this reason that he would abandon conceptualizations of dharmas that have a material form. He should draw a conclusion (vicārayet, T. nram par dpayad) from the non-apprehension of those things that are in principle apprehensible. Thus having broken down (vibhāvyayā, T. nram par bshig nas) dharmas with a material form, he should break down (vibhāvyayā, T. nram par bshig bya) those without material form’.

It is apparent that here the conceptual analysis or ‘breaking down’ of experienced realities is considered part of the process of insight. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to consider the inferences comprising this analysis as instances of cintāmaṇī prajñā. Because they are undertaken while in the sphere of saṃādhi, they are properly considered as meditative in nature; they form part of what is meant by bhāvanāyāṃ prajñā. They appear to be distinct from cases of ordinary inference insofar as they seem to be conceived as directly ‘based upon’ objects and objective states of affairs being concurrently experienced in meditation. This appears to be so in the sense that the meditator is thought of as being able to remain one-pointedly focused upon such objects, holding them in view while ‘analysing’ them.
non-experiential processes of ordinary reasoning (cintāmayi prajñā); this opens the door to two possible ways of translating. The first would take dhyāna as the default term for meditation, exclusively referring to states in which there is no deliberate discursive activity. Vipaśyanā would be understood as a complimentary intellectual process that is not meditative in nature. But the problem with this suggestion is that it does not recognize Kamalaśīla’s acceptance of vipaśyanā as a subdivision of samādhi, as discussed above. A second, more sophisticated possibility would treat both nonconceptual dhyāna and rational vipaśyanā as kinds of meditation – albeit forms which are distinct and mutually exclusive in their natures. As rational insight, vipaśyanā would count as a kind of meditation much in the same way as do Descartes’ reflections for the western intellectual tradition. On this account, the process of meditation would have to consist of a serial alternation, back and forth, between the modes of ordinary rational thought and wholly non-conceptual concentration.30 While coherent, the problem with this account is that it fails to take seriously the Indian division of wisdom into three kinds and the clear connection between vipaśyanā and bhāvanāmayi prajñā. Furthermore, and perhaps more tellingly, it does not accurately reflect Kamalaśīla’s own descriptions of the process of insight. A careful reading of the texts shows that Kamalaśīla’s understanding of the discernment of reality is not that of a kind of ordinary reasoning, but that of a special kind of conceptual analysis that occurs while actually abiding in a state of meditative concentration (samādhi).

While it is true that Kamalaśīla nowhere explicitly states that this includes the first dhyāna, there is no reason in principle to exclude this possibility, given the presence of thought therein. In fact, given Kamalaśīla’s descriptions of the analytic process, the upper ‘intermediate’ division of the first dhyāna seems the most likely candidate for the sphere of concentration in which this special kind of conceptual analysis is practised. As described in the Bhāvanākramas, the discernment of reality involves cultivating an accurate perception of the true nature of the constituents of conventional reality. In other words, it involves the ‘discrimination of dharmas’ (dharma-pravicaya). This discrimination involves mindfulness practices (smṛtyupasthāna) and specific acts of what might be called ‘perceptual judgement’ as to the ultimate emptiness of dharmas. At one point Kamalaśīla describes this experiential process of examining the nature of dharmas as being so vivid that it is like looking at the blemishes on one’s face through its reflection in a mirror.31 It

30. On the conception of the process of meditation as a kind of serial alternation, see Williams (1989: 72–4) and Ruegg (1989: 111–12).
31. Bhk 3 2.5–8: tasyaiva ca pratibimbasya svabhavanā nirūpayan yogi, darpanāntargatasvamukhap ratibimbapratyaveksanena svamukhagatavairūpyaṇāṃ vinīṣcayavat, sarvadharmāṇāṃ yathāvat svabhāvagamāt /; D 56a7–8: rnal ’byor pa gzugs brnyan de nyid kyi ngo bo nyid la rtoq pas chos thams cad kyi ngo bo nyid ji lta ba bzhin du khong du chud de / bdag gis bzhin gyi gzugs me long gi nang du byung ba la brtags na bdag gi bzhin la mi sduag pa la soṣa pa mngon pa bzhin no /; ‘And in determining the nature of that very reflection on the basis of understanding the nature of all dharmas as they are, the yogin is as if ascertaining blemishes upon his own face by discerning its reflection in a mirror’.
seems clear that Kamalaśīla is not describing a case of ordinary logical reasoning, but rather a subtle form of meditative analysis. It is an intentionally undertaken practice that occurs in a heightened state of one-pointed consciousness, a practice that is at once conceptual analysis and meditation.

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ABBREVIATIONS


B. U. Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad

Bhk Bhāvanākramah


Skt. Sanskrit

Vism Visuddhimagga

T. Tibetan

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

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