

Excerpt from

OPEN MIND

*View and Meditation in the
Lineage of Lerab Lingpa*

TRANSLATED BY B. ALAN WALLACE

EDITED BY EVA NATANYA



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Preliminaries to the Practice of the Great Perfection

Just as astronomers need observatories to engage in research, so do professional contemplatives need suitable facilities to support them in their explorations of the nature of consciousness and its role in the universe. In his explanation of the preparations for the meditation session to make the mindstream a suitable vessel, Lerab Lingpa begins by highlighting the importance of retreating to a quiet place, free of mundane distractions, either in solitude or in the company of like-minded companions. An astronomical observatory must be equipped with a high-quality, well-maintained telescope, and in all other scientific research laboratories sophisticated instruments of measurement and experimentation play a central role. But for the first-person exploration of the mind, one's own body, speech, and mind are the basis of all observations, so considerable effort must be given to see that they are all balanced in a state of equilibrium. As the Buddha declared, "The mind that is established in equipoise discovers reality."¹ On this basis one offers prayers of supplication to one's guru, asking for blessings to inspire one's practice.

Lerab Lingpa then proceeds to set forth seven preliminary practices that are shared between Sūtrayāna and Vajrayāna practice: namely, (1) meditation on impermanence, (2) meditation on the way in which even the pleasures of saṃsāra are causes leading to unhappiness, (3) meditation on the way there is no closure, no matter how much we strive for favorable circumstances in saṃsāra, (4) meditation on the futility of all superficial human pursuits, whether good or bad, (5) meditation on the benefits of liberation, (6) meditation on the importance of the guru's practical

1. Cited in Kamalaśīla's first *Bhāvanākrama*, in Tucci, *Minor Buddhist Texts*, 205.

instructions, and (7) how to settle the mind in its natural state, since this method is so crucially important.

In the classic literature on the stages of the path to enlightenment (*lamrim*), including Atiśa's *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, Gampopa's *Ornament of Precious Liberation*, and Tsongkhapa's *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, *śamatha*, or meditative quiescence, is taught within the context of the six perfections that provide the framework for the bodhisattva way of life. But Lerab Lingpa's approach in this text is distinctive in that he introduces *śamatha* prior to his explanation of the unique preliminary practices. These preliminaries include an exceptional approach to taking refuge, cultivating bodhicitta, the combined practice of purifying obscurations and accumulating merit and knowledge, and guru yoga. Nowhere in his discussion of the shared and unique preliminary practices does he make any reference to "accumulating" a hundred thousand recitations or prostrations. Nor does Dūdjom Lingpa make any such reference in any of his five principal treatises on the Great Perfection. Both these nineteenth-century masters were far more concerned with engaging in these practices until they yield the inner transformations for which they were intended, regardless of how long this may take. During a public teaching at the San Francisco Zen Center in 1980, the late Kalu Rinpoché, one of the greatest Mahāmudrā masters of the late twentieth century, was asked about the proper sequence of *śamatha* and the preliminary practices to Vajrayāna. He replied that if one completes the preliminary practices prior to practicing *śamatha*, this helps to dispel obstacles to *śamatha* and provides merit to help bring this practice to its culmination. On the other hand, he added, if one first achieves *śamatha*, this will greatly enhance the efficacy of the preliminary practices. So there is no one definitive order to these practices, but they are all indispensable.

The culmination of Lerab Lingpa's presentation of the shared preliminaries is "settling the mind in its natural state," which he emphasizes as "a sound basis for the arising of all samādhis of the stages of generation and completion," let alone the subsequent meditations that are unique to

the Great Perfection. This refers to a particular approach to the achievement of śamatha—one also emphasized in the Great Perfection teachings of Dūdjom Lingpa—that he calls “taking the impure mind as the path” and “taking awareness and appearances as the path.” Although this phase of meditative practice is widely overlooked, misunderstood, or marginalized in Buddhism today, its function of subduing the five obscurations of the mind is crucial for all schools of Buddhism. As the Buddha himself declared, “So long as these five obscurations [attachment to hedonic pleasure, malice, laxity and dullness, excitation and anxiety, and afflictive uncertainty] are not abandoned one considers oneself as indebted, sick, in bonds, enslaved, and lost in a desert track.”² More specifically, shortly before his achievement of enlightenment, the Buddha came to the insight that the achievement of the first *dhyāna*, or meditative stabilization, was an indispensable step on the path of awakening:

I thought of a time when my Śākya father was working and I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose apple tree. Quite secluded from sensual desires and disengaged from unwholesome things, I entered into and dwelt in the first dhyāna, which is accompanied by coarse and precise investigation, with well being and bliss born of seclusion. I thought, “Might this be the way to enlightenment?” Then, following that memory, there came the recognition that this was the way to enlightenment.³

While there are many śamatha methods, all of them having the function of overcoming the five obscurations, the particular method taught by Lerab Lingpa is especially characteristic of the Great Perfection and Mahāmudrā. He succinctly explains this method as follows:

2. *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* in *Dīgha Nikāya* 173.

3. *Mahāsaccaka Sutta* [MN 1246], in Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 340, with modification of the original translation.

[640] . . . Whatever kinds of experiences and visions arise—be they gentle or violent, subtle or gross, of long or short duration, strong or weak, good or bad—observe their nature and avoid any obsessive evaluation of them as being one thing and not another. Let the heart of your practice be consciousness, naturally at rest, lucid and clear. Acting as your own mentor, if you can bring the crucial points to perfection, as if you were threading a needle, the afflictions of your own mindstream will be subdued, you will gain the autonomy of not succumbing to them, and your mind will constantly be calm and composed.

Düdjom Lingpa, as explained by his commentator, Pema Tashi, further clarifies four stages of mindfulness that are achieved along this path:

According to the teachings, there are four types of mindfulness of the essential nature of the path. The first entails distinguishing between stillness and movement, and by the power of familiarizing yourself with their different appearances, there is *single-pointed mindfulness* of the unification of the two. Then, even while resting without strenuously observing them as you did before, as its natural power manifests, there is *manifest mindfulness*. Abiding loosely without mindfulness in a vacuous, wide-open clarity, a spacious vacuity, constitutes lying down on a bed that is *devoid of mindfulness*, which is the *substrate*. Once coarse mindfulness has subsided, resting in a luminous vacuity is called *self-illuminating mindfulness*, or the *substrate consciousness*. The former two kinds of mindfulness [single-pointed mindfulness and manifest mindfulness] directly perceive whatever creative displays arise, while during the latter two [the absence of mindfulness and self-illuminating mindfulness], apart from abiding solely in dependence upon a subtle mode of apprehension, all radiant appearances and creative displays of thoughts cease, so there is only nonconceptuality. These kinds of mindfulness are aroused by the path, and since

they descend to the two types of substrate,⁴ they are called the *substrates of descent*. Some teachers regard the first as the “one taste” and the second as “freedom from conceptual elaboration.” Others claim it is ethically neutral, but whatever they call it, you have arrived at the essential nature of the mind.⁵

In this passage Pema Tashi, following Dūdjom Lingpa, refers to the *substrate* (Skt. *ālaya*) and *substrate consciousness* (Skt. *ālayavijñāna*), commonly associated with the Cittamātra, or Mind Only, school of Indian Buddhism, which presents them as being inherently existent. In contrast, in the pith instructions of the Great Perfection, these terms refer to aspects of the mind that are directly experienced when one comes to the culmination of the path of śamatha, and their inherent existence is explicitly refuted. So there is nothing in these references that is incompatible with the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka view, which is discussed in detail in the *Selected Essays on Old and New Views of the Secret Mantrayāna*. While many practitioners in Tibet have mistaken the experience of the substrate consciousness for exalted states of Mahāmudrā realization within the context of the four yogas, such as “one taste” and “freedom from conceptual elaboration,” Dūdjom Lingpa brushes such claims aside and instead claims simply that one has realized the “essential nature of the mind.” Here he is not referring to its ultimate nature, but rather the phenomenal, defining characteristics of ordinary consciousness, namely, luminosity and cognizance. Pañchen Lozang Chökyi Gyaltzen explains the same śamatha practice and its significance in the following passage:

4. The two types of substrate are the actual substrate (corresponding to the absence of mindfulness) and the temporarily luminous substrate (corresponding to self-illuminating mindfulness). The former is a mindless vacuity, like the sky at dusk, covered over by darkness, while the latter makes it possible for thoughts to appear, just as a polished mirror reflects a face. By letting the temporarily luminous substrate consciousness rest in the pristine nature of emptiness, the assemblies of roving thoughts cease, causing a radiant vacuity to appear. This corresponds to the second type of substrate.

5. Dūdjom Lingpa, *The Heart of the Great Perfection*, 52–53.

The nature of meditative equipoise is not obscured by anything, but is lucid and clear. Not established as anything physical, it is a clear vacuity like space. Allowing anything to arise, it is vividly awake. Such is the nature of the mind. This is superbly witnessed with direct perception, yet it cannot be grasped as “this” or demonstrated with words. “Whatever arises, rest loosely, without grasping”: nowadays, for the most part, contemplatives of Tibet uniformly proclaim this as practical advice for achieving enlightenment. However, I, Chökyi Gyaltzen, declare this to be an exceptionally skillful method for novices to achieve mental stillness and to identify the phenomenological nature of the mind.⁶

As indispensable as this meditation is, especially as a preparation for the main practices of the Great Perfection, the achievement of such meditative equipoise by itself does not bring about any irreversible transformation or liberation of the mind. As Düdjom Lingpa clarifies:

I think people who spend their whole life at this and regard it as the best of practices may be fooling themselves by compounding one delusion with another . . . If I examine those whose lives pass in this way, I see that in the past they have created the causes for spinning around and around in saṃsāra under the influence of dualistic grasping. It seems to me that if they persist in overdoing such meditation, what need is there to say that this will act as a great anchor, further grounding them in saṃsāra?⁷

Settling the mind in its “natural state” entails the ordinary, coarse, dualistic mind (which arises from moment to moment in dependence upon physical processes within the body) dissolving into an underlying, subtle continuum of individual mental consciousness that precedes the formation of the body and continues on after its death. This continuum, which is strongly

6. *Collected Works of Paṅ chen blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan*, 4: 86.

7. Düdjom Lingpa, *Heart of the Great Perfection*, 145.

configured by the body and physical environment, is reduced to its essential nature of luminosity and cognizance, which bear no human characteristics. This is the ground of each sentient being's succession of lifetimes in saṃsāra, and it has been experientially verified countless times by contemplatives of diverse schools of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism. In his classic treatise *The Path of Purification*, the fifth-century Theravāda commentator Buddhaghosa refers to it as the *bhavaṅga*, or "ground of becoming." The fourth-century Mahāyāna contemplative Asaṅga explains that with the achievement of śamatha, "due to the absence of mindfulness and of mentation, when the meditative object is dissolved and released, the mind rests in the absence of appearances."⁸ His brother Vasubandhu, equally renowned as a master of Buddhist theory and practice, likewise declared that with the achievement of śamatha, technically known as the "threshold to the first dhyāna, or meditative stabilization in the form realm, the five sense consciousnesses are dormant."⁹ In accordance with the Mahāyāna sūtras and authoritative Indian commentaries, Tsongkhapa states in his *Medium Exposition of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* that with the achievement of śamatha, specifically referring to the threshold of the first dhyāna, only the aspects of the sheer awareness, clarity, and vivid joy of the mind appear, without any sensory appearances arising to one's awareness. This, he says, is needed as the basis for eliminating the mental afflictions of both non-Buddhist and Buddhist contemplatives, and by cultivating insight on that basis, it is possible to achieve liberation from all the fetters of saṃsāra.¹⁰

The achievement of śamatha is foundational for the realization of all the four yogas that constitute the path of Mahāmudrā, namely, the yogas of single-pointedness, freedom from conceptual elaboration, one taste, and nonmeditation. Domang Gyatrul Rinpoché (1924–), a lineage holder of both the Mahāmudrā and Great Perfection traditions, explains that "the first stage of single-pointedness occurs with the accomplishment of

8. *Śrāvakabhūmi, Yogasthāna III*, Bihar MS., 12a6–5, translation by B. Alan Wallace.

9. Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, 4: 1231.

10. See the section "A General Presentation of the Way to Proceed along the Path on the Basis of Quiescence," in Wallace, *Balancing the Mind*, 213–17.

śamatha, wherein one single-pointedly attends to one's own awareness, which is primordially unceasing and luminous."¹¹ The Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorjé (1284–1339), associates the small stage of the yoga of single-pointedness with the Mahāyāna path of accumulation, the first of the five paths culminating in perfect enlightenment, but this requires that one's experience of śamatha be augmented by the practice of vipaśyanā, which yields insight into the mind's empty nature. In his classic treatise *The Extensive Mahāmudrā: The Ocean of Definitive Meaning*, the Ninth Karmapa, Wangchuk Dorjé (1556–1603), concurs that full achievement of śamatha, in which one does not sense either the movements or presence of one's breath or body, is the optimal preparation for effectively engaging in the practice of vipaśyanā.¹² This describes a distinctive characteristic of resting in the ground of becoming upon having reached the threshold to the first dhyāna.

After his presentation of the unique preliminary practices, which prepare one for Vajrayāna practice, Lerab Lingpa gives concise explanations of key elements of the two stages of tantra: the stage of generation and the stage of completion. According to all the New Translation schools of Tibetan Buddhism—including the Kagyü, Sakya, and Geluk traditions—in order to achieve the enlightenment of a buddha, each of these two stages of anuttarayogatantra practice must be perfected. First one must perfect the stage of generation with the full achievement of śamatha, insight into emptiness by way of vipaśyanā, and realization of pure vision and divine pride. On that basis one must perfect the five stages of the stage of completion,¹³ culminating in buddhahood. Within the context of the Great Perfection, Lerab Lingpa indicates that an abbreviated practice of these two stages is sufficient as long as they are supplemented by the two main types of meditation according to the Great Perfection, namely, *cutting through* and the *direct crossing over*. Among the five principal treatises on the Great Perfection by

11. Karma Chagmé, *Naked Awareness*, 223.

12. Karma pa dbang phyug rdo rje, *Phyag rgya rgyas pa nges don rgya mtsho* (Sarnath, India: Vajra Vidyā Institute Library, 2006), 102.

13. See Tsongkhapa, *A Lamp to Illuminate the Five Stages*.

Düdjom Lingpa, only *The Vajra Essence* gives detailed explanations of the stages of generation and completion, but it states that these phases are not indispensable for everyone following the path of the Great Perfection. Two of the other four of those treatises focus only on four indispensable elements of the Great Perfection: śamatha, vipaśyanā, cutting through, and the direct crossing over. One explains only the first three of those practices, and one discusses in detail only vipaśyanā and cutting through.

In a similar vein Lerab Lingpa highlights the distinctive features of the Great Perfection relative to the stages of generation and completion:

In dependence upon such splendid pith instructions on any of the elaborate or concise methods of the authentic generation stage practices of the unsurpassed Mantrayāna, [670] there are numerous, extraordinary methods for experiencing the clear light as the culmination of vital energies entering, remaining, and dissolving into the central channel by way of the stage of completion. But here, without needing to resort to them, there are pith instructions for directly severing delusive thoughts, which are potent and easy to practice. If you follow them correctly, delusive thoughts, along with their karmic energies, naturally cease. When that happens, whether you recognize it or not, it is inevitable that the undeluded, actual nature of the mind will nakedly emerge.

Vipaśyanā Meditation

Nowadays the practice of Buddhist insight meditation, commonly known by the Pāli term *vipassanā*, has often been simplified and denuded of all its uniquely Buddhist aspects under the rubric of “mindfulness meditation.” Casting aside the extraordinary theoretical and epistemological richness of the Buddha’s own explanation of the four applications of mindfulness,¹⁴ the popularized version of vipassanā is reduced to moment-by-moment

14. See Anālayo Bhikkhu, *Satipaṭṭhāna*, and Wallace, *Minding Closely*.

awareness of whatever arises in the field of one's awareness. Many of its proponents proclaim that this is the "essence of Buddhist meditation without the Buddhism" and even go so far as to claim this as the universal essence of all meditation, equating it with the Theravāda practice of "bare attention," Krishnamurti's "choiceless awareness," the Zen practice of "just sitting," and "open monitoring" as taught in Mahāmudrā and the Great Perfection. For all the success of this propaganda campaign, such claims are false. In his commentary to his own treatise, the *Treasure of Wish-Fulfilling Jewels*, Longchen Rabjam states: "Nowadays many people say it is enough to recognize the awareness of the present moment, and there's no point to there being many teachings. If that were enough, there would be no need for the Buddha's other teachings. But in fact this single-pointed awareness of the present moment must depend precisely upon listening [to teachings] and upon guru yoga, so they refute themselves with their own words."¹⁵

Lerab Lingpa explains the practice of vipaśyanā after his explanation of the stages of generation and completion in his discussion of "The Preliminary Practice of Cutting the Basis of Delusion from the Root." While it is necessary to fathom the empty nature of all phenomena, the classic approach of vipaśyanā meditation in both the Great Perfection and Mahāmudrā traditions is to investigate analytically the origins, location, and destination of the mind that is now under direct, unmediated scrutiny. Lerab Lingpa comments:

. . . Therefore, however much mere appearances that are empty of causes, consequences, and an essential nature may arise in the aspects of the birth, cessation, and abiding of a deceptive mind—or else in the aspects of its origin, location, and destination—[679] from the very moment they arise, ultimately such movements and transformations have never existed. Recognition of that is known as *realization of the actual nature of the mind*.

15. Cited in Dharmasāra's essay "A Jeweled Mirror of Pure Appearances" in the present volume, at Tibetan page [208].

In “Oral Instructions of the Wise” in the present volume, Lerab Lingpa’s disciple Dharmasāra clarifies the relationship between śamatha focused on the mind and the vipaśyanā practice of engaging in ultimate analysis of the origin, location, and destination of the mind:

[132] . . . When engaging in this kind of Mahāmudrā meditation, śamatha is achieved by focusing on the mind, such that one seeks the view on the basis of meditation. In dependence upon this śamatha, the mind is settled with the aspect of things as they are, once one has correctly determined the birth, cessation, and abiding of the mind as being without identity.

Having experientially isolated the essential nature of the mind, free of the five obscurations, the contemplative is now optimally prepared to explore that actual nature of the mind, examining whether or not it bears its own inherent identity, independent of conceptual designation. When it comes to fathoming the origins, location, and destination of consciousness and its role in nature, beyond the distorting influences of laxity, excitation, and the vagaries of the human mind, the achievement of śamatha may be likened to launching a telescope into space, beyond the distorting influences of the Earth’s atmosphere. To fathom the origins, constitution, and eventual fate of celestial phenomena, it is not enough to examine the terrestrial correlates of the relative movements of the sun, moon, planets, and stars, as was done by generations of astrologers before Kepler and Galileo. Likewise, to determine the phenomenological nature of one’s own mind, let alone to gain the ontological insight that its origin, location, and destination are empty of inherent nature, it is not enough to examine the neuronal and behavioral correlates of mental processes and states of consciousness. Scientifically and contemplatively, there is no substitute for directly observing, with the highest possible degree of sophistication and precision, the phenomena one is seeking to understand.

Scientific inquiry into the nature of the mind did not even begin until roughly three hundred years after the rise of the scientific revolution in the

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and especially over the past century, cognitive scientists continue to limit their observations mostly to the neuronal correlates and behavioral expressions of the mind. Given the limitations of this methodology, it is inevitable that virtually all scientific theories of the mind reduce it to a function or emergent property of physical processes that are amenable to such objective research. The actual nature of mental events, their relation to the body, and the role of consciousness in the natural world therefore remain as much a mystery now as they were when the scientific study of the mind began roughly 135 years ago.

The Buddhist approach in general, and the approach of the Great Perfection and Mahāmudrā in particular, are diametrically opposed to the reductionist beliefs of scientific materialism. This approach begins with an observation made by the Buddha himself: “All phenomena are preceded by the mind, issue forth from the mind, and consist of the mind.”¹⁶ The Great Perfection and Mahāmudrā explore this hypothesis in great depth and conclude that insight into the mind’s empty nature readily leads to universal insight into the emptiness of all phenomena that arise as objects of consciousness. In “An Ornament of the Enlightened View of Samantabhadra” in this volume, Lerab Lingpa’s disciple Jé Tsultrim Zangpo writes, “If you ascertain this mind of yours as being empty of true existence, simply by extending that reasoning you will ascertain all phenomena to be empty of true existence.” He elaborates on this point:

[58] . . . Moreover, a person with sharp faculties who can determine that this mind, which plays such a dominant role, cannot be established as truly existing from its own side, as something really, substantially existent, is someone who can determine the absence of true existence even with subtle reasoning, simply by having been shown partial reasons for establishing that absence. For such a person, just by force of a revelation as to whether or not the mind has any color or shape, and just by force of being

16. *Dhammapada* 1.1.

taught the reasons why the mind is devoid of any [true] origin, location, or destination, that person will proceed to establish the fact that the mind lacks true existence by way of subtle reasoning that refutes a subtle object of negation. Thus, by the extraordinary power of relying on such reasoning, people with superior faculties are able to realize the emptiness of all phenomena.

This brings us back to a salient characteristic of the Great Perfection and Mahāmudrā: the theme of first balancing the mind in meditative equipoise through the achievement of śamatha focused on the mind, and then letting the view of emptiness and the ultimate ground of consciousness experientially emerge from within. Karma Chagmé (1613–78), one of the greatest Tibetan scholars and contemplatives who was a lineage holder of both the Great Perfection and Mahāmudrā, explains this point by way of the analogy of cutting down a tree in order to procure firewood:

In some scholarly, discursive meditations in the *sūtra* tradition, one continually seeks out the mind, and there is a tradition in which investigation is needed. Here, in the tradition of Mahāmudrā and Atiyoga, it is enough to seek and investigate during this phase of Dharma practice, but afterwards it is not necessary to continue to search . . . Geshés dwell in the monastic colleges for many years and study both Madhyamaka and the Prajñāpāramitā. They memorize many volumes, and, devoting their lives to explanations and discussions, they cut through conceptual elaboration from the outside. That way is difficult to learn, difficult to understand, difficult to know, and difficult to realize; and among those who study and acquire knowledge in that way, there are many who fail to realize the meaning. The entire meaning of all that education is included in this examination of the mind. This cuts through conceptual elaborations from within, so it is easy to learn, easy to understand, easy to know, and easy to realize. Cutting through conceptual elaboration from the

outside is like wanting dried pine wood, and drying it by cutting off the pine needles and branches one by one. So it is difficult. In contrast, cutting through conceptual elaboration from within is easy, for it is like cutting the root of the pine tree so that the branches dry up naturally.¹⁷

At first glance the Mahāmudrā and the Great Perfection approach of determining the mere absence of any color or shape of the mind and then recognizing the mind to be empty of any true origin, location, and destination may seem much easier than laboriously studying the great Madhyamaka treatises by Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, Longchen Rabjam, and Tsongkhapa and then painstakingly identifying the object of refutation, namely, inherent existence. For contemplatives with very sharp faculties who have realized the phenomenological nature of the mind by achieving śamatha focused on the mind and who are under the close guidance of an accomplished master of Mahāmudrā or the Great Perfection, the ontological analysis of the mind's origin, location, and destination may indeed be the most effective manner of realizing emptiness. But without that meditative preparation and without such close guidance, one may simply realize that the mind has no physical qualities and that one cannot identify the origin, location, or destination of the mind. Such insights are relatively trivial and do not bring one onto the Buddhist path.

The View, Meditation, and Conduct of the Great Perfection

Eurocentric, secular modernity, which has now achieved global domination, is characterized by and is rooted in the triad of materialism, hedonism, and consumerism, each element of which is inextricably bound up with the other two. The worldview of materialism proposes that everything in the universe consists solely of matter and its emergent properties, or more broadly, of configurations of space-time and matter-energy. Such a way of

17. Karma Chagmé, *A Spacious Path to Freedom*, 100–101.

viewing reality necessarily implies that one will value only this aspect of reality, resulting in the relentless, insatiable pursuit of physically aroused, hedonic pleasures and the avoidance of physically caused bodily and mental suffering. Such a system of values, in turn, supports a consumer-driven way of life, which—with the ever-growing human population—is resulting in the catastrophic degradation of the natural environment.

Similarly, scientific research operates within a triad of views, values, and conduct. All such research requires a theoretical framework, which includes hidden, often unquestioned assumptions and working hypotheses, and that framework is materialist to the core. With that foundation, the only kind of evidence that is considered scientifically compelling is physical evidence acquired with the use of instruments of technology. Scientific inquiry also requires certain ethical standards on the part of researchers, including rigor and honesty in the collection, analysis, and reporting of their data; and for research involving human and animal subjects there are further ethical standards that must be met.

The triad of view, meditation, and conduct is equally relevant to all schools of Buddhist and non-Buddhist contemplative inquiry. Specifically, with respect to this triad as it relates to the Great Perfection, Lerab Lingpa writes:

Furthermore, the *view* is seeing with the primordial consciousness of each one's own awareness, which nakedly perceives the nonduality of subject and object, free of conceptual elaboration, and without support. A yogin who realizes that practices the great freedom from extremes, which is the naturally luminous, nonconceptual inner space of the actual nature of the mind. The *meditation* is the achievement of the yoga—or of the stability in clarity—that comes from familiarization with such practice. The *conduct* is not to follow after good and bad objects and mental states, [660] but to gain mastery over the experience of everything arising naturally as ornaments of pristine awareness. If you can continuously apply yourself

day and night to such conduct, meditation, and view for seven days, you will simultaneously achieve the yogas of śamatha and vipaśyanā.

A central feature of the view of the Great Perfection is drawing a clear distinction between the ordinary, dualistic mind, which reifies the distinction between subject and object, and pristine awareness, which is the ultimate ground of all of existence, transcending all conceptual frameworks and articulation. In his opening essay, “Oral Instructions of the Vidyādhara Gurus,” Dharmasāra emphasizes the centrality of experientially seeing this distinction:

[33] . . . Now even though one understands that the Great Perfection is a swift path that is devoid of conceptual elaborations, without precise knowledge of what that means, one will mix this up with the three kinds of laziness, such as lethargy. So even if one spends a lot of time diligently sustaining the sense of luminosity and cognizance but without distinguishing between the mind and pristine awareness, there is the great danger that one will go astray without attenuating attachment and hostility in the least.

The main practices of meditation in the Great Perfection are two: cutting through to the original purity of pristine awareness and directly crossing over to the spontaneous actualization of the creative expressions of pristine awareness. Jé Tsultrim Zangpo’s essay “An Ornament of the Enlightened View of Samantabhadra” discusses both of these core meditations, with the first, cutting through, comprising four kinds of open presence. All of these are rooted in the prior, experiential ascertainment of pristine awareness, experienced as a dimension of reality quite distinct from one’s ordinary, causally conditioned mental states. Gaining such experiential recognition is therefore key to the entire point of the practice of the Great Perfection. Jé Tsultrim Zangpo then provides an exceptionally clear presentation of how to take the first steps in such practice, based on the prior achievement

of śamatha and insight into the empty nature of the mind and all other phenomena by way of vipaśyanā:

Well, if you wonder how you can sustain the essential nature of pristine awareness by embracing from the very beginning the raw, indwelling, actual primordial consciousness, clear light, in reliance on the guru's pith instructions, [81] it is like this. Beginners are not able from the outset to take as the path the clear light primordial consciousness, pristine awareness that has never come in contact with any of the karmic energies. However, as stated previously, the cognizance that is the radiance, or rays, of the ground pristine awareness pervades all the good and bad thoughts that arise in the present, and it is present in the nature of this mind. While the distinct thoughts that arise in the present moment are not themselves pristine awareness, their nature, or basic disposition, is pristine awareness. So you must be able to recognize that basic disposition and remain there. Therefore the consciousness that is present in this very moment is not pristine awareness, but, as stated previously, in this present consciousness there is one aspect of the *mind*, the conceptual fabrications that have come under the influence of fluctuating karmic energies, and then there is the aspect of *cognizance* that has achieved autonomy so that it cannot be moved by fluctuating karmic energies. So if you can distinguish between those two, you can cast off the aspect of the mind, hold to that cognizance, and find that you can remain there.

In the practice of cutting through, it is imperative to realize not only the primordial luminosity of pristine awareness but also the indivisibility of this awareness and the emptiness of all phenomena. This is the referent of the phrase “the union of luminosity and emptiness,” which appears frequently in the meditative literature of the Great Perfection and Mahāmudrā. Jé Tsultrim Zangpo adds: “If you remain in cognizance

simply without abandoning the sphere of empty space that is the nature of existence of such pristine awareness, and sustain that, you are both sustaining cognizance and remaining in the space of emptiness. So that is also the meditation where you meditate on both pristine awareness and emptiness simultaneously.” Finally, he clarifies how such nonconceptual meditation on awareness and emptiness relates to the teachings on emptiness as presented in the Madhyamaka Prāsaṅgika tradition, in accordance with the writings of both Tsongkhapa and Longchen Rabjam:

[110] . . . Therefore you should loosely rest pristine awareness in the nature of the empty space of cognizance and remain there without modification. That must be a stabilizing meditation alone, without analyzing the object of negation. This must lead to the ascertainment of emptiness by way of stabilizing meditation, without reliance upon rational analysis regarding the absence of an object of negation that is either one or many, and so on. For that to happen you must first ascertain how connate self-grasping holds to the very subtle object of negation, as taught in the Madhyamaka Prāsaṅgika tradition.

The final culmination of the stages of cutting through and the direct crossing over is the achievement of the rainbow body, which manifests in different ways in accordance with the depth of one’s practice. Nowadays many Tibetan contemplatives both inside and outside Tibet have demonstrated their ability to rest in pristine awareness during the dying process, which manifests outwardly as the cessation of the heartbeat, respiration, and brain activity but with no decomposition of the body over a period of days or even weeks. Other less-accomplished contemplatives reach the culmination of the dying process in which their mind dissolves into the substrate, but without realizing pristine awareness. Depending on the stability of their concentration, they may unconsciously remain in the substrate for as long as three days. After dissolving the mind into the substrate, for accomplished contemplatives the “clear light of death,” which is none other

than pristine awareness, arises spontaneously, and with sufficient preparation one may linger in this realization of pristine awareness and emptiness. This ability manifests physically in ways that can be studied scientifically, but the inner experience of the yogi remains hidden to all those who have not ascertained pristine awareness for themselves. Regarding the relationship between one's stage of meditation while still alive and the duration of one's experience of pristine awareness at death, Padmasambhava explains:

The number of days you remain in meditation in the clear light of the dying process corresponds to the stability and duration of your present practice. Those who have achieved stability of practice lasting throughout the day and night may achieve stability lasting seven human days at death. But for those who have not entered the path, the clear light will not appear for longer than the time it takes to eat a bowl of food.¹⁸

Here again, in his teachings mystically revealed to Dūdjom Lingpa, Padmasambhava gives a clear and definitive account of the different levels of achievement of the rainbow body:

Those of the most superior faculties are liberated as a great transference body, extending infinitely into the all-pervasive dharmakāya, like water merging with water or space merging with space. Those of middling faculties attain enlightenment as a great rainbow body, like a rainbow vanishing into the sky. For those of inferior faculties, when the clear light of the ground arises, the colors of the rainbow spread forth from absolute space, and their material bodies decrease in size until finally they vanish as rainbow bodies, leaving not even a trace of their aggregates behind. That is called the *small rainbow body*. When the clear light of the ground arises, the material bodies of some people decrease in size for as long as seven days. Then, finally, they leave only the residue of their

18. Dūdjom Lingpa, *Vajra Essence*, 263.

hair and nails behind. The dissolution of the body into minute particles is called the *small transference*. For those of superior faculties, this dissolution of the body into minute particles may occur even during the practice of cutting through.¹⁹

The practices of the Great Perfection and Mahāmudrā begin by turning the attention inward on the nature of one's own mind and consciousness itself. As the meditation progresses, it results in changes in one's body and mind, some of which may be studied scientifically. Even in the recent past there have been accounts of Tibetan contemplatives in Tibet manifesting the rainbow body.²⁰ The teachings and practices leading to such a remarkable transformation are available to us all today, and when people in the modern world prove themselves capable of manifesting the rainbow body in full collaboration with open-minded scientists, this may trigger an unprecedented revolution that will have profound repercussions for all branches of the natural sciences, from the cognitive sciences down to the foundations of modern physics.

19. Dūdjom Lingpa, *Vajra Essence*, 254.

20. For a provocative discussion of the rainbow body, including eyewitness accounts of a Tibetan who recently achieved this state of realization, see Tiso, *Rainbow Body and Resurrection*.