

Preparing for Śamatha Installing the self-correcting attention system

Purpose of Chapter 2
Clarifies what qualifies as a valid object for śamatha
Prevents common errors in object selection
Bridges doctrinal foundation (Chapter 1) and method (Chapter 3)

Pocket Reminder
Śamatha is trained by holding one object clearly and steadily
Choose wisely; train patiently; do not improvise
Do not force the mind — assemble the causes
Calm arises when conditions align

Preparation for Chapter 3
Chapter 3 explains how to focus flawlessly
Once causes are established, method becomes decisive (Chapter 3)
Object discipline underpins all later training

General Criteria for a Valid Object
Object must appear to the mind
Object must be stable and repeatable
Object must not provoke strong afflictions
Object must support mindfulness and introspection

Classification of Meditation Objects
Objects Shared with Non-Buddhists
Breath
Elements
Light or space
Mental images
Can produce śamatha but not liberation

Objects Unique to the Buddhist Path
Body of the Buddha
Virtues of the Buddha
Mental images constructed through training
Support bodhicitta and right view

The Buddha as the Supreme Object
Combines stability, clarity, and virtuous orientation
Supports faith, joy, and sustained effort
Most suitable object for beginners on the Lamrim path

Constructed Mental Image
Object is deliberately created by the mind
Visualisation begins with simple features
Clarity grows after stability is established
Image is held, not analysed or improved

External Images as Preparation
Looking at statues or paintings of the Buddha
Used to stabilise initial visualisation
Not the final object of meditation

Breath Meditation Clarified
Detail before stability causes instability
Breath can calm gross agitation
Often used as preparation, not final śamatha object
Risk of subtle laxity if used without vigilance

Practice Orientation
Choose one object and commit to it
Avoid switching objects frequently
Stability takes precedence over vividness
Change object only for clear reasons

Object Discipline: Errors and Their Consequences
Using an object that does not appear clearly → Leads to dullness and instability → Encourages subtle laxity
Chasing clarity instead of stability → Produces tightening and mental agitation → Encourages subtle excitement
Allowing the object to change during meditation → Trains instability → Prevents continuity of mindfulness

Switching Object Frequently → Fragments attention → Undermines depth
Using an Inappropriate object → May provoke attachment or aversion → Encourages coarse excitement
Mistaking calm or absorption for śamatha → Confuses suppression with stability → Prevents development of pliancy

1. Samatha is causal, not accidental
Meditative technique alone is insufficient
Mind is dependently arisen — including the meditative mind
Śamatha arises within the training of the Six Perfections
Ethics stabilises conduct
Patience stabilises reactivity
Joyous effort stabilises enthusiasm
Concentration stabilises attention
Wisdom stabilises view
Each perfection reduces grasping at self in a different domain

Central Principle
Śamatha is empty of inherent existence and arises through conditions
Śamatha requires:
A clearly defined object
Sustained single-pointed attention
Stability free from laxity and excitement
Object must be suitable for sustained single-pointed attention
Calm without an object does not train śamatha

Relation to Emptiness of Self
Each precondition reduces reification of 'I' and 'mine'
Dependent arising applies to meditation itself
Śamatha emerges when causes are complete

Samatha fails for two reasons:
1. Causes incomplete
2. Object poorly chosen

Installing the Self-Correcting Attention System
Preparation makes the ground workable
Attempting concentration without causes leads to failure
Chapter 2 assembles the causes before technical method begins

2. Preparing the Ground Before Meditation
Ethics protects object stability
External distraction mirrors internal distraction
Simplicity outside → continuity inside
Violating criteria produces fault

The Six Preconditions for Śamatha
not about object choice they are about removing friction

(1) Dwelling in an Appropriate Place
Low stimulation
Predictability
Ethical livelihood
Few threats to safety or attention
Distracting environments recreate a distracted self

(2) Having Little Desire
Desire agitates the future
Strengthens self-referencing mind
Weakening craving quiets agitation

(3) Being Content
Discontent rejects the present
Contentment weakens identity-driven dissatisfaction
Supports stability of mind

(4) Giving Up Many Activities
Fragmented roles fragment attention
Identity multiplication multiplies distraction
Continuity of mind requires simplicity

(5) Pure Ethical Discipline
Ethics creates cognitive coherence
Unethical action produces regret and narrative proliferation
Ethics quiets after-thought and conceptual turbulence

(6) Abandoning Thoughts of Desire, Fame, Gain
Not repression but insight into karmic cost
Identity-driven striving fuels distraction
Seeing their emptiness weakens the self-project

Functional Insight of the Six Preconditions
They reduce friction before meditation begins
They weaken grasping self indirectly
They make the mind serviceable for Chapter 3 method

Diagnostic Overlay
Is the ground stable, and is the object suitable?
If No, do not blame meditation technique yet.

A. Diagnostic Incomplete Causes
Meditation feels Chaotic before it begins → Examine environment
Mind constantly planning or anticipating → Examine desire / future-oriented grasping
Persistent dissatisfaction during sessions → Examine contentment
Mind fragmented across roles or obligations → Examine activity load
Regret or mental replay appears repeatedly → Examine ethical discipline
Thoughts of recognition, gain, or status intrude → Examine subtle fame/gain motivations

B. Diagnosing Wrong Object Selection
Object does not appear clearly → dullness → Preparation insufficient or object unsuitable
Object provokes attachment or aversion → Wrong object for temperament
Mind becomes dull quickly → Object too vague or too subtle
Mind becomes tense or agitated → Chasing clarity instead of stability
Frequently wanting to switch objects → Avoiding depth

Causal Symmetries
Environment ↔ Attention
Desire ↔ Excitement
Discontent ↔ Agitation
Ethics ↔ Stability

Ethics protects object stability

Discontent tightens attention

Subtle ambition distorts meditation

Desire fuels excitement