



Chapter 5 stages and signs of śamatha

if progress stalls while it feels calm: suspect subtle laxity (clarity down, grip slack)

if you can't say what happened in the sit: introspection is weak; strengthen mindfulness first

review after the sit; train during the sit

diagnostics (quick checks)

over-monitoring during practice (turns training into anxiety)

pushing for vivid imagery instead of stable recognition

over-applying antidotes at stage 8-9 (tightening a tightened string)

train: place → return → stabilise → refine; then review signs of pliancy (don't guess early).

pocket reminder

śamatha makes the mind serviceable (stable, clear, workable)

vipāśyanā later uses that stability to analyse and realise emptiness (especially self-emptiness)

śamatha-vipāśyanā bridge (kept light here, but essential)

guard-rail: 'objectless/signless' does not mean 'blank mind'

what distinguishes śamatha: mental pliancy + physical pliancy (serviceability)

key dividing line: stage 9 is not yet śamatha

mental pliancy arises first

then physical pliancy (energy/winds become workable)

physical bliss tends to arise first; then becomes a cause for mental bliss

don't chase bliss; if it stirs excitement, it's not yet stable serviceability

pliancy sequence (what tends to happen)

1) form-realm-like mind + pliancy + single-pointedness

2) capacity to purify afflictions via mundane or supramundane paths

3) pliancy and equipoise arise quickly when you sit; if not, reassess

4) desire-realm obstacles largely don't occur (sense-pull weakens markedly)

5) some pliancy remains after the session; daily activity is easier/steadier

shows up as...

part 2 — assessment machinery (how you know it is śamatha)

five marks (arrival checks)

calm/blank/pleasant ≠ śamatha

effortless stability without pliancy ≠ śamatha

don't confuse non-discursive quiet with emptiness

⚠ false positives (common mistakes)

🗑 cushion card — what to do in one session

aim (stage 1-2): many clean returns, not vivid images

object: one seed feature of śākyamuni (pick one and keep it)

gold face oval (no details)

urna as a small bright point (between brows)

halo ring (soft circle of light behind the head)

hands in meditation mudrā (simple bowl-shape at lap)

10-minute micro-rep drill (stage 1 training)

look 10-15 sec → close 2-5 sec → refresh 5-8 sec (repeat 25-35 times)

if it fades/changes: refresh immediately; don't chase or repair

micro-rep drill ↔ stage 1 placement (look → close → refresh)

session rule: train first, review after (don't self-monitor mid-sit)

Main hidden danger subtle laxity warning ↔ diagnostics ↔ stage 5-7 emphasis

1) placement: can place the mind on the object (vague is ok)

2) continuous placement: can keep it briefly; noticing distraction is progress

3) patched placement: shorter 'time lost'; mindfulness + introspection become effective

4) close placement: gross wandering largely stops; mindfulness strengthens

5) taming: delight in concentration grows; laxity becomes the main danger; introspection becomes primary

6) pacification: faults can be stopped early, even as they are about to arise

7) complete pacification: subtle faults are abandoned quickly; perseverance matters

8) one-pointed attention: no breaks from laxity/excitement, but light effort remains

9) balanced placement: effortless stability; immediate cause of śamatha, but not yet śamatha

nine stages (what changes)

stage 9 ↔ 'not yet śamatha' (dividing line = pliancy)

six forces ↔ nine stages (each force maps to its stage range)

four attentions ↔ stage ranges (1-2, 3-7, 8, 9)

six forces (what powers progress)

hearing/study → stage 1

reflection → stage 2

mindfulness → stages 3-4

introspection → stages 5-6

perseverance → stages 7-8

familiarity/acquaintance → stage 9

diagnostic question: which force is weak right now? train that.

part 1 — training machinery (how stability is built)

four attentions (texture of practice)

tight focus (stages 1-2): intense, easy to slip

intermittent focus (stages 3-7): continuity grows but breaks occur

uninterrupted focus (stage 8): no breaks, but effort remains

spontaneous focus (stage 9): effortless stabilisation

continuity matters: avoid long gaps; modest daily practice still plants the seed

stages 1-2: win by short sessions + relentless returning

stages 3-4: win by strengthening mindfulness (prevent straying)

stages 5-6: win by introspection (catch sinking early)

stages 7-8: win by perseverance (subtle signs matter)

stage 9: win by familiarity (stop muscling; don't over-apply antidotes)

stage-based emphasis (action eyes)