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Overview of all Volume 4

This summary and analysis treats Volume 4 as your personal field manual for cultivating śamatha (calm-abiding) that is explicitly engineered to interlock with vipaśyanā (special insight). Here is a complete, narrative overview of the volume's terrain; extracting the main arguments; showing how the classical frameworks (five faults/eight antidotes; nine stages of mental placement; six powers; four engagements) actually work in practice; and threading short, concrete meditation tips throughout so you can pause, contemplate, then absorb. Keeping one eye on how this sets you up for Volume 5 (wisdom/insight).

The aim of Volume 4 in the Lamrim arc

Tsongkhapa's lamrim (and Geshe Sopa's commentary) organise the Great Scope so that **bodhicitta's vast motivation** becomes **workable mind**. Volume 4 is the hinge: it turns the bodhisattva's heart into a precision instrument. The book's thesis is simple and demanding:

Without a stable, clear, serviceable mind (śamatha), analysis cannot cut to the bone. But without analysis (vipaśyanā), stability becomes a cul-de-sac of serenity. Therefore, first craft reliable stability, then yoke it to penetrating inquiry, and finally unify both in one session.

Practically, Volume 4 lays down:

- the **preconditions** for calm-abiding,
- the **method** of cultivating it (what to watch, how to watch, how to repair),
- the **diagnostics** for obstacles (laxity vs. excitation) and how to balance them,
- the **benchmarks** for progress (nine stages, pliancy, the "serviceable mind"),
- and the **hand-off** to vipaśyanā that Volume 5 completes.

Big-picture architecture

1) Why śamatha is non-negotiable

Geshe Sopa emphasises that the **mind you bring to emptiness matters**. A scattered, heavy, or fragile attention cannot sustain the subtle balancing act of Madhyamaka analysis. Calm-abiding:

- stabilises attention long enough for analysis to **bite**,
- refines clarity so the object (eventually, emptiness) is **vivid**,
- yields **piancy** (physical/mental ease), which makes long sessions joyful rather than depleting.

2) The supportive field

Ethical restraint, non-harm, clean livelihood, moderated diet and sleep, sensible solitude, a good teacher, and an uncluttered room are not pious decorations; they are **engineering constraints**. Break them and your attentional system remains noisy.

3) The method proper

The famous lamrim toolchain:

- **Five faults** and **eight antidotes** (the repair kit),
- **Nine stages of mental placement** (the roadmap),
- **Six powers** and **four engagements** (the propulsion system).

4) The deliverable

You end Volume 4 with a mind that can **stay** (bright, buoyant, precise, and obedient) so that Volume 5 can **see**.

The supportive field (causes and conditions)

Motivation and frame

Every session begins inside **refuge and bodhicitta**. This is not sentiment; it's cognitive framing. Bodhicitta:

- prevents the subtle clinging to “my progress,”
- supplies resilience when the mind won't cooperate,
- aligns serenity with **altruistic purpose**, avoiding the trap of tranquil self-absorption.

Practice note (30–60 sec):

Before sitting, think: *“May this session purify obscurations and enlarge my capacity to benefit beings. May serenity become the harness for wisdom.”* One deep exhale; begin.

External conditions (brief but real)

- **Place:** clean, quiet, slightly cool, modest light. Same seat if possible.
- **Time:** regularity beats heroics. Same time daily if life allows.
- **Body:** light meal; minimal stimulants; steady sleep.

Inner conditions

- **Ethical baseline:** keep precepts you hold; repair slips fast.
- **Reduce gross agitation:** simplify commitments during early training cycles.
- **Teacher/text:** keep a single authoritative instruction set open (here: Geshe Sopa/Tsongkhapa) to avoid mixing signals.

The method: a complete diagnostic-therapeutic loop

A. Five faults and eight antidotes (the repair kit)

Five faults

1. **Laziness** (inertia/aversion to the cushion)
2. **Forgetting the instruction** (object/method slips)
3. **Laxity & excitation** (dull vs. jumpy mind—this pair is the core)
4. **Non-application** (seeing a fault but not fixing it)
5. **Over-application** (keep “fixing” even after it stabilises; tightening an already tightened string)

Eight antidotes (paired as therapies)

- To Laziness → **Faith** (confidence in value), **Aspiration** (willingness), **Effort** (energy), **Pliancy** (experienced ease that sustains momentum)
- To Forgetting → **Mindfulness** (continuous remembering of the chosen object & clarity cues)
- To Laxity/Excitation → **Introspective awareness** (alertness that samples quality), plus **Appropriate application** (tighten or relax)
- To Non-/Over-application → **Equanimity** (stop fixing when it's fine; fix promptly when it's not)

Practice note (micro-drill):

At the **3-minute** mark of any session, ask: *“What's present?”*

- If **heavy/blurred** → elevate the spine, brighten the mental image, breathe three crisp inhalations.
- If **jittery/pulled** → soften the gaze, extend the exhale, briefly widen attention to include the whole body, then return.

B. Nine stages of mental placement (the roadmap)

1. **Placement:** you can find the object.
2. **Continuous placement:** you can keep it briefly.
3. **Re-placement:** you notice you left and come back faster.
4. **Close placement:** mind strays less; corrections smaller.
5. **Tamed:** coarse agitation eased.
6. **Pacified:** coarse dullness eased.
7. **Thoroughly pacified:** subtle excitation recognised and regulated.
8. **Single-pointed:** subtle dullness resolved; object vivid, steady.
9. **Equanimity: effort drops;** attention stays by itself (spontaneous engagement).

Six powers moving you along: hearing → thinking → mindfulness → alertness → perseverance → familiarity.

Four engagements: forceful → interrupted → uninterrupted → spontaneous.

Practice note (checkpointing):

End each week by noting **which stage** most describes your average session. Treat back-and-forth movement as normal. The “gain” is trend-line stability, not a linear ladder.

C. The live heart of śamatha: balancing laxity and excitation

- **Coarse laxity:** you notice slumping, heaviness, warmth + blur—object woolly.
- **Subtle laxity:** object seems stable but **brightness/precision** is down 10–20%. This one fools practitioners.
- **Coarse excitation:** obvious scattering to stories/sounds.
- **Subtle excitation:** a **filament** of the mind leans forward, slightly ahead of the object, “pinging” it.

Correctives

- For **laxity:** straighten, refresh the object (sharpen edges or cool, bright tone), imagine daylight at the heart, slightly **increase interest**.
- For **excitation:** emphasise **heaviness/ground** in the lower abdomen, extend out-breath, narrow the attentional aperture a little, add one beat of **contentment** (“enough”).

Practice note (two-minute rescue):

If you can't tell which it is, test both: (1) brighten for two breaths; (2) ground for two breaths. Which improved contact? Stay with that remedy.

Choosing your object and posture: making it personal

Object

Tsongkhapa allows many; Geshe Sopa typically steers students to a **virtuous, steady object** that welcomes both clarity and devotion:

- **Breath at the nostrils** (clean, neutral, always available)
- **A simple Buddha image** (small, luminous, about one arm's length in front; same image each session)
- **A syllable** (e.g., ཨ / “A”) for those drawn to sound-form unity

For your explicit interest in vipaśyanā, choose an object that can later **become the launch-pad** for analysis (a Buddha image is excellent; it easily transitions to **dependent-arising analysis** in Volume 5).

Posture

Seven-point Vairocana: stable seat, straight spine (not stiff), shoulders level, chin slightly tucked, tongue to palate, gaze soft through the nose line (eyes open or half-open helps excitation); hands at rest. Comfort but **alert**.

Practice note (object fidelity):

Pick one object for **90 days**. Variation is for analysis sessions, not for your śamatha engine.

What successful śamatha feels like (and what it isn't)

Phenomenology

- **Pliancy**: the body's micro-tensions release; sitting becomes inherently pleasant.
- **Bliss, clarity, non-conceptual "smoothness"** begin to show as **nyam** (experiences).
- **Serviceability**: you can place attention where you want, for as long as you want, with as much resolution as you want.

Warnings

- Don't mistake **pleasant absorption** for special insight. Bliss and lights do not equal wisdom.
- Subtle laxity masquerades as "peace." Keep **brightness** non-negotiable.
- If the image starts to "breathe," "beam," or appear 3-D, fine; just **don't chase effects**.

Practice note (safety rail):

Every session ends with **dedication** and **brief analytic recall**: one sentence on dependent arising or bodhicitta. It inoculates you against absorption-pride and quietly orients you to Volume 5's work.

How śamatha and vipaśyanā actually interlock

1. Before śamatha is strong

Use **short, light analysis** (1–3 minutes) to kindle interest, then **rest** on the chosen object. This prevents spacing out and builds the habit that **stability serves seeing**.

2. When śamatha stabilises (Stages 6–8)

Now extend **analytic pulses**: e.g., after 10–15 minutes of clean placement, **pivot** for 5–7 minutes into a single **dependent-arising or emptiness theme** (see "mini-protocols" below), then **return** to placement. You are training **one session, two gears**.

3. Union within one session

Volume 5 will formalise **special insight conjoined with calm-abiding**: the analysis is no longer a ragged thinking; it is a **laser**—continuous, vivid, undistracted, powered by pliancy. Practically, it feels like the mind is both **quiet** and **cutting**.

Practice note (session architecture; 30–40 min)

- 3 min: refuge/bodhicitta; breath sweep
- 15 min: steady placement on your object (repair laxity/excitation as needed)
- 7 min: analytic pulse (pick one theme below)
- 3–5 min: return to placement; smooth edges
- 1–2 min: dedication; stand slowly

Analytic pulses you can safely run during Volume 4

(Keep them short; aim for vividness, not comprehensiveness.)

A. Dependent-arising “zoom” (object analysis)

Take the Buddha image (or breath sensation). Examine: *“Exactly how does this appear?”* Dissect: colour, edge, spatial position, dependence on eye, light, attention, memory. See how each facet **depends** on conditions; none is self-standing. Release the pulse; return to placement.

Tip: If the image dulls, re-brighten first, then analyse for < 60 seconds.

B. Agent–action analysis (selflessness cue)

While steady, ask: *“Where is the observer?”* Search head, chest, space, image. Notice only **momentary aggregates** + knowing. No controller found. Don’t strain. Two or three clean looks; then return.

C. Three-times check (past–present–future)

Gently test: past image gone, future not here, present ungraspable because it’s **changing while you look**. Let that insight soften clinging; rest again.

D. Short logic (diamond sliver)

Pick **one**:

- *If phenomena were inherently one with their causes, they couldn’t change; if utterly other, contact would be impossible.*
 - *If self were inherently itself, no training could transform it; yet it transforms.*
- Touch the logic like a match to kindling; then back to śamatha.

Building a realistic training rhythm (months, not days)

Month 1–2: 20–30 minutes daily. Main aim: **continuous placement** with **clean repairs**. Many short sits beat heroics.

Month 3–4: Extend main sit to 35–45 minutes. Add 1–2 **micro-sits** (7–10 minutes) purely for “find and fix laxity/excitation.”

Month 5–6: One longer sit (45–60 minutes) most days; **analytic pulse** becomes consistent; image vivid **without strain**.

Practice note (aging body care):

If the back or hips protest, do **10 minutes on a chair**, then **10 on the cushion**, then chair again. Pliancy is a sign, not a prerequisite.

Frequent snags and how to unstick them

“I can’t tell laxity from peace.”

Calibrate **brightness**. Ask: *“Could I read fine print on the object?”* If not, it’s subtle laxity.

“I keep chasing pleasant nyam.”

Pre-commit: *“If bliss/clarity comes, I neither feed nor fear it.”* Two gentle breaths; replace the mind.

“Effort is exhausting me.”

You’re likely **over-applying**. Try **5% less pressure** for two minutes. If the object holds, keep that setting.

“Life is busy; consistency collapses.”

Shrink the sit, never skip the sit. Even **8 minutes** preserves momentum. Keep weekend **one longer sit**.

“I feel flat; no juice.”

Return to **faith/aspiration**: reread a pith on the benefits of a serviceable mind; visualise your teacher’s delight at your steadiness; dedicate to someone suffering today.

Tying Volume 4 back to your work on Suffering (and forward to Wisdom)

From the suffering synthesis you just did, three carry-overs matter:

1. Origin of suffering is cognitive error supported by compulsion.

Śamatha weakens the **compulsive** groove; vipaśyanā uproots the **error**. Same project, two tools.

2. Antidotes must be timely and balanced.

In your four powers practice (regret, reliance, remedy, resolve), notice how śamatha’s **remedy** piece is precisely the **eight antidotes** at the attentional level.

3. Integration is the medicine.

Daily life presents the “eight worldly dharmas” (praise/blame, gain/loss, etc.) as drills. Carry **micro-placement** into conversations: one breath on the spot between the eyebrows; feel the body; watch reactions arise and pass. That is the “off-cushion” śamatha that keeps the insight pump primed.

A compact daily template you can use immediately

Morning (25–35 min)

- 2 min: refuge–bodhicitta, guru remembrance
- 12–18 min: placement on chosen object (repair loop active)
- 4–6 min: **one** analytic pulse (dependent-arising of the object)
- 2 min: rest in placement
- 1 min: dedication

Evening (10–15 min)

- 1 min: brief review of the day (where attention held; where it bled)
- 7–10 min: light placement; emphasise **relax-without-collapse**
- 1–2 min: four opponent powers (very short), dedication

Micro-interventions (3× per day, 30–60 sec)

- Breathe low and slow; silently label “**clear & steady**”; feel the contact points; release the jaw; return.

What “success” in Vol 4 looks like before you turn to Vol 5

- You can sit most days with **low friction**; starting is easy.
- You **know** (in the body) the difference between subtle laxity and true calm.
- The object lives with **crispness**; when it blurs, your hands **automatically** reach for the right antidote.
- One or two **analytic pulses** each day feel clean, not ragged.
- You’ve tasted **mental and physical pliancy** (even briefly) and can re-evolve the conditions that favour it.
- You end sessions **lighter** and more **available** to others; not withdrawn.

When these are largely in place, Vol 5’s step (**conjoining śamatha with special insight** so that analysis becomes an undistracted, vivid seeing of emptiness) lands naturally. Your guru’s counsel to **take time for contemplation and absorption** is crucial here: let stability **ripen** until it begins to carry itself; then let wisdom **drink** from that still pool.

Closing encouragement

You've already built a rigorous practice intellect through your work on suffering. Volume 4 asks for the complementary virtue: **reliability**; a mind that comes when called and holds what it's given with luminous care. Go slowly; savour small, repeatable wins; keep the sessions warm with bodhicitta; and let each analytic pulse be **short but diamond-sharp**. When stability and inquiry start to mingle in a single breath, you'll feel the doorway to Volume 5 opening from the inside.

A once a day nudge

If you want a tiny “keep the pilot light on”: once a day, 60 seconds:

- one steady exhale,
- place attention on a single point (nostrils or eyebrow point),
- silently label “clear & steady,”
- dedicate: “May this steadiness serve wisdom for all.”

Introduction

Why Volume 4 matters (and how it shifts your practice)

After bodhicitta and the six perfections, the lamrim turns decisively from building **motivation and method** to stabilising the **instrument** that does the seeing: the mind. Volume 4 opens by clarifying two complementary excellences:

- **Śamatha (calm abiding):** cultivating **unified, pliant attention**; bright, buoyant, and serviceable, free of laxity (dullness) and agitation (scatter).
- **Vipaśyanā (special insight):** using that serviceable attention to **see dependently-arisen phenomena as empty of inherent existence**, beginning (especially) with the **self of the person**.

The introduction's keynote is **fit-for-purpose attention**. We're not seeking stillness for its own sake. Śamatha is the **scaffold** that allows vipaśyanā to work deeply without toppling into distraction or dullness; vipaśyanā is the **direction** that keeps śamatha from becoming a refined but saṃsāric cul-de-sac. If you remember just one sentence from the introduction, let it be: **stability serves seeing; seeing purifies stability.**

The conditions you're being asked to assemble

The introduction reviews the **inner and outer causes** for success:

- **Inner:** ethical clarity (no remorse dragging the mind); a light, joyful tone (the mind likes to come to the cushion); steady faith that the path works; and explicit **bodhicitta** so that even concentration practice bends toward others' welfare.
- **Outer:** simple place; moderate food and sleep; a sustainable schedule; few fresh karmic entanglements; and guidance you actually follow.

This is not moralism. These conditions **tune the nervous system** so attention can rest **brightly**. When remorse, over-stimulation, or over-effort are present, the mind either sags (laxity) or fizzles (agitation). The introduction's practical promise is blunt: **get the causes right and progress is normal; ignore them and even "good sessions" stay rare and accidental.**

What counts as real progress

A recurring Volume-4 theme is **diagnostic clarity**:

- Early progress = **less time lost** in distraction & **faster recovery**, not "no thoughts."
- Mid progress = you can **hold an object** with clear edges and a **gentle watchdog** (introspection) that notices dull/fast shifts.
- Mature progress = **mental and physical pliancy**; a felt ease and readiness, like a well-oiled hinge, that makes both stillness and analysis pleasant and sustainable.

The introduction also warns against two wrong turns:

1. mistaking **blank tranquility** for śamatha, and
2. doing **analysis with a restless attention**, which breeds cleverness without transformation.

How śamatha and vipaśyanā interlock (the Volume-4 promise)

The lamrim model is not to "stabilise for years, then analyse." It's **iterative**:

1. Use method practices (breath, Buddha image, or "mind observing mind") to **brighten and steady**.
2. Apply **brief, well-aimed analysis**; especially to the **person** (*Where is the "I"? How does it exist if everything about it is changing and dependently labeled?*).
3. **Settle again** so the analytic clarity **permeates** the stream rather than fray it.

4. Carry the **flavour** into post-meditation as a light, continuous recognition: things function, but only as **mere designations**.

In short: **placement (śamatha) makes analysis deep; analysis (vipaśyanā) makes placement meaningful.**

A short practice from the Introduction (10 minutes)

1. **Motivation (30s):** “May this training make the mind fit to recognise the self as mere designation, so I can help others well.”
2. **Settle (3–4 min):** breath at the nostrils; count to 10 and restart; sit tall, brighten the object slightly.
3. **Probe (3 min):** let attention rest on the felt sense of “I.” Ask: *What do I take this ‘I’ to be? Body? Mind? Their owner?* As you look, notice only **changing parts and labels**. There’s no solid core.
4. **Return (2–3 min):** rest again on the breath, now lightly infused with the recognition: *functions continue; nothing needs a solid self to do so.*
5. **Dedicate (30s).**

Two felt signs you’re on track: the mind ends **brighter** (not foggy) and **warmer** (bodhicitta didn’t evaporate).

Chapter 1. Śamatha and Vipāśyanā

1. Placing Chapter 1 in the Lamrim

Tsongkhapa ends his long treatment of the first four perfections (generosity, ethics, patience, perseverance) and now introduces the **last two perfections: meditative stability (śamatha) and wisdom (vipāśyanā)**.

These two complete the entire bodhisattva path and are the bridge to liberation and full enlightenment.

Chapter 1 functions as a **doctrinal orientation** before the technical practice instructions of Chapters 2–6.

2. Why These Two Perfections Matter

Geshe Sopa repeatedly stresses a single thesis:

All mundane and supramundane qualities (from basic virtue to buddhahood) arise from śamatha and vipāśyanā together.

This chapter clarifies:

- **What śamatha and vipāśyanā are**
- **Why they must be cultivated together**
- **Why śamatha must come first**
- **Why neither one alone is sufficient**

The underlying Mahāyāna view is that **mental afflictions (kleshas) and their seeds (dysfunctional tendencies)** have ignorance as their root; only **wisdom knowing emptiness** uproots this root, and only **stabilised concentration** allows wisdom to strike deeply enough.

3. The Benefits (and Necessity) of Cultivating Both

3.1 Śamatha (calm abiding)

Śamatha is defined as:

The mind able to remain on its object as long as one wishes, free from excitement and laxity, accompanied by mental and physical pliancy.

Key features:

- Complete mental stability
- A blissful pliancy where body no longer obstructs meditation
- A mind that follows intention effortlessly (“the mental king”)

Why essential?

- Without stability, any analytical meditation rapidly fragments.
- Śamatha temporarily **suppresses** the active afflictions (“bondage of signs”).

3.2 Vipāśyanā (special insight)

Vipāśyanā is:

A sharp, penetrating, analytic wisdom that discerns reality; culminating in the direct non-conceptual realization of emptiness.

Why essential?

- Only vipāśyanā cuts the **seeds** of afflictions (“bondage of dysfunctional tendencies”).
- Only insight into **emptiness** (the complete lack of intrinsic existence) can reverse the deep habit of self-grasping.

3.3 Why they must be combined

Śamatha alone brings peace but **not liberation**.

Vipaśyanā without śamatha is unstable, “like an oil lamp in the wind.”

Only their union removes the root of suffering.

Tsongkhapa’s image:

- **Śamatha = windscreen protecting the lamp**
- **Vipaśyanā = the lamp’s light**

Without both, one cannot see the painting (emptiness) clearly.

4. The Nature of Śamatha and Vipaśyanā

4.1 Śamatha’s internal mechanics

- Requires solitude and sustained inward attention
- Relies on **vigilant introspection**; the “spy” checking for laxity or excitement
- Uses a **single chosen object** without analysis
- Progresses through the **nine stages of sustained attention** (elaborated in later chapters)

Crucially, **realising emptiness is not required** to achieve śamatha; non-Buddhists achieve it.

4.2 Vipaśyanā’s mechanics

- Begins with inferential reasoning
- Requires śamatha to stabilise analysis until conceptual grasp dissolves
- Matures into **direct perception of emptiness**
- Ultimately becomes a non-dual, uninterrupted knowing in Buddhahood, where śamatha and vipaśyanā are naturally united

5. Why Śamatha Must Come First

Śamatha precedes vipaśyanā **not in the sense of intellectual understanding**, but:

- **Śamatha must precede the direct realization of emptiness.**

You can conceptually understand emptiness before śamatha, but cannot pierce to its depth and uproot ignorance.

Reasons:

1. **Analytic insight requires stability**; otherwise the mind scatters.
2. **The special mental dexterity of vipaśyanā** arises *only when śamatha’s pliancy is present*.
3. **The union of calm and insight** (śamatha supporting vipaśyanā) is the definition of the supramundane path.

A critical clarification from Tsongkhapa:

Conceptual understanding of emptiness is not vipaśyanā.

Vipaśyanā only begins when śamatha-pliancy joins analytic wisdom.

6. The Wider Framework: Desire, Form, Formless Realms & the 81 Afflictions

Chapter 1 ends with an extensive doctrinal clarification:

- Each of the **three realms** contains **nine afflictions**, each subdivided into **9 intensities** (big-big through small-small).
- Hence **81 afflictions per realm-level**.
- Use ‘emptiness’ as object for supramundane method to use a shortcut

- The **sharpest yogis** eliminate all *big-big* afflictions across all realms simultaneously, then all *big-medium*, etc.
- Others proceed gradually: first desire-realm afflictions, then form-realm, then formless-realm.

The table and explanation on **pp. 25–27** show this clearly.

Relevance to śamatha–vipaśyanā:

These explanations demonstrate how only the **supramundane path (union of calm and insight)** truly eliminates afflictions from the root.

7. Mahāyāna Motivation: Bodhicitta as the Ground

All the above practices are framed within the bodhisattva motivation:

- The **whole purpose** of cultivating śamatha and vipaśyanā is to remove obstacles so that one may benefit all beings.
- Bodhicitta ensures meditation is not for self-quietism but for **expanding compassion through wisdom**.

8. Two Truths, Dependent Arising, Emptiness of Self

Implicit throughout:

- **Conventional truth:** appearances governed by causality; śamatha works here.
- **Ultimate truth:** emptiness; the lack of intrinsic self in persons and phenomena; vipaśyanā reveals this.
- **Dependent arising** is the bridge:
Because things arise dependently, they cannot exist inherently; because they lack inherent existence, they can arise dependently.

Thus, the **emptiness of self** is central:

*All afflictions arise from the instinctive belief in a real “I” and “mine.”
Only insight into emptiness overcomes the self-cherishing mind.*

9. Practice Notes (Śamatha–Vipaśyanā in Daily Training)

Śamatha practice notes

- Choose one object and remain with it (breath, Buddha image, suffering of saṃsāra, emptiness.)
- Use introspective vigilance to catch:
 - **laxity** (dullness)
 - **excitement** (agitation)
- Short sessions prevent fatigue; continuity builds momentum.

Vipaśyanā practice notes

Because direct vipaśyanā is not yet possible, begin with:

- **Inferential reasoning:**
Analyse the self:
 - Where is it?
 - What makes it “inherently me”?
 - How do parts/assemblies give rise to the illusion?
- Allow insight to become emotionally impactful.

Union practice note

Join the two gently:

- Stabilise the mind → introduce analysis briefly → rest again.
- Like the fish swimming without disturbing the bowl.

10. Diagnostics & Common Pitfalls

Signs of progress

- Mind stays on object naturally
- Increasing pliancy
- Strong clarity without strain
- Immediate recognition of laxity/excitement

Pitfalls

1. Mistaking quietude for awakening

Hva Shang–style “stop thinking” is a dead end: stopping thought does not cut ignorance.

2. Over-intellectualising emptiness

Insight must be lived, not debated.

3. Neglecting ethics

Ethical discipline is the “soil” in which śamatha can grow.

4. Trying to practise both from the beginning without sequence

Leads to confusion, frustration, and little depth.

11. Contemplative Progression

1. Conceptual clarity →
2. Inferential understanding →
3. Stabilised mind through śamatha →
4. Union of calm and insight →
5. Direct perception of emptiness (ārya stage) →
6. Removal of afflictions →
7. Removal of knowledge-obscurations →
8. Buddhahood

12. Pocket Reminder (1–2 sentences)

Stabilise the mind, sharpen the wisdom, join them inseparably.

When calm abides with insight, the self-grasping root is cut, and compassion becomes effortless.

Chapter 2. Preparing for Śamatha Meditation

Installing the self-correcting attention system

(How the ground is made workable before true mental stability can arise)

1. Why this chapter matters in the Lamrim structure

Chapter 2 is **not yet about “doing” śamatha** in the ordinary sense. It is about **why attempts at concentration fail** when the causes are missing, and **why Tsongkhapa insists that śamatha is causal, not accidental.**

The great error Tsongkhapa is correcting here is the belief that:

“If I just sit long enough, or get the right instruction, calm abiding will appear.”

Instead, this chapter establishes that **śamatha arises only when its causes are assembled**, and that **meditative technique alone is insufficient.**

This reflects the deepest Lamrim principle:

Mind is dependently arisen — including the meditative mind.

Śamatha itself is empty of inherent existence; it arises only through conditions.

2. The Six Preconditions: calming the conditions, not forcing the mind

The six prerequisites are not moralistic rules. They are **functional conditions** that remove friction from the mind.

They work because they **quiet the grasping self** long before formal meditation begins.

(1) Dwelling in an appropriate place

This is not romantic solitude. It means:

- Low stimulation
- Predictability
- Ethical livelihood
- Few threats to safety or attention

The key insight:

A distracted environment continually re-creates a distracted “I.”

Śamatha cannot stabilise if the sense of self is constantly being reasserted through threat, noise, or social entanglement.

(2–3) Having little desire & being content

These are paired because they work together.

Desire agitates the future.

Discontent rejects the present.

Both strengthen a **solid, dissatisfied self:**

“I need more to be okay.”

Contentment weakens self-referencing, which is why it directly supports concentration.

(4) Giving up many activities

Even virtuous activities can obstruct śamatha if they:

- Fragment attention

- Reinforce identity (“helper,” “fixer,” “teacher”)
- Prevent sustained continuity of mind

Tsongkhapa is ruthless here:

Anything that multiplies roles multiplies distraction.

(5) Pure ethical discipline

Ethics here is **not moral purity** but **cognitive coherence**.

Unethical action creates:

- Regret
- Justification
- Mental narrative

All of these are **conceptual proliferation**, which is poison to śamatha.

Ethics quiets *after-thought*, which quiets the mind.

(6) Ridding oneself of thoughts of desire, fame, gain

This is not repression.

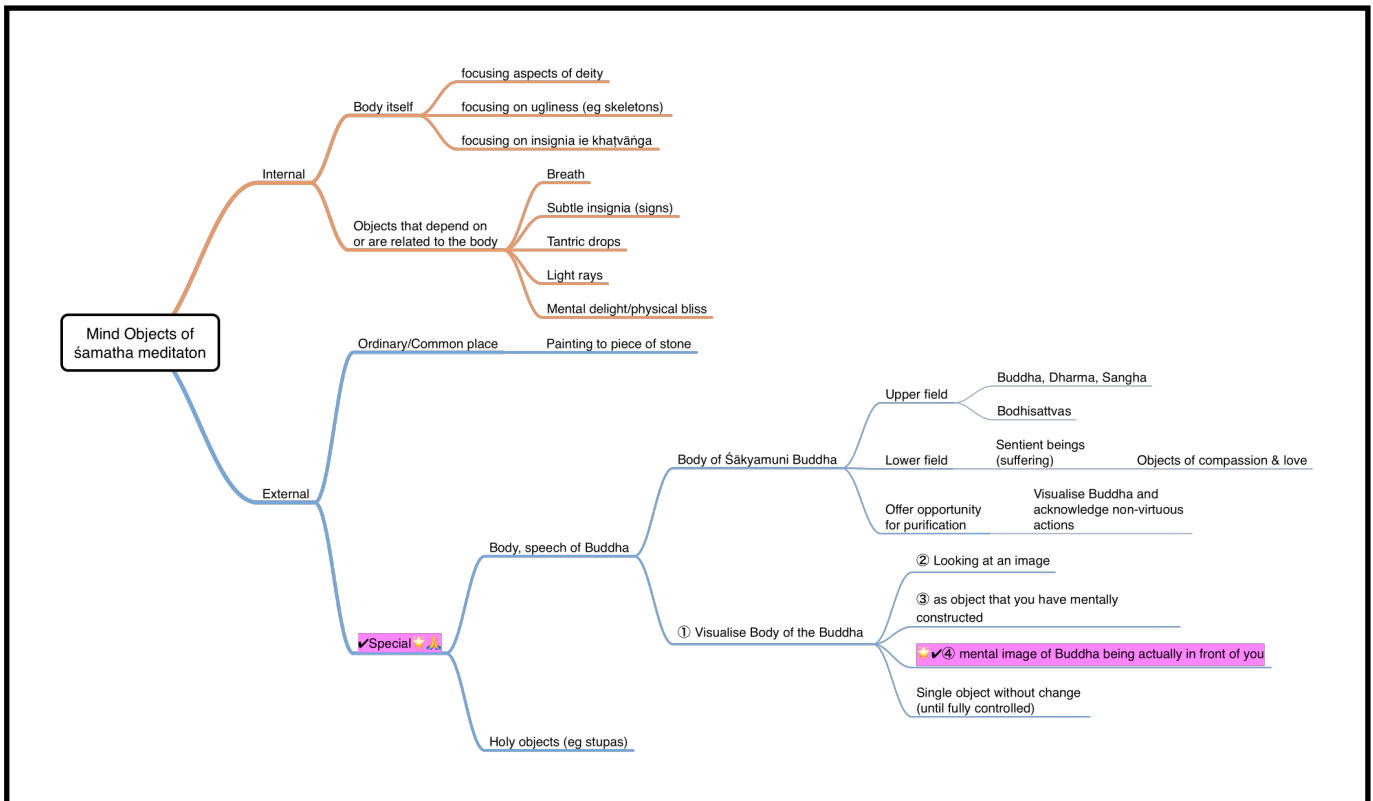
It is **seeing the karmic cost of identity-driven striving**.

The meditator is training to see:

“These thoughts do not lead where I think they lead.”

This reflection weakens the *self-project* that fuels distraction.

(7) Identifying Objects of Mediation for this Context



This subsection is **not** a general theory of meditation. It is a **very narrow claim**:

If the aim is the attainment of śamatha as defined in the Lamrim tradition, then only certain objects and methods are causally capable of producing it.

Everything else in the passage serves that claim.

Point 1 — Breath and “internal mechanisms” calm the mind but do not produce śamatha

Focusing on breath (internal mechanism) may be a useful calming mechanism but it does not produce samatha applies **in this context**.

The text’s claim is *not* that breath meditation is useless. It is that:

Focusing on internal processes (like the breath) can calm gross agitation but does not, by itself, generate the level of stability and control that qualifies as śamatha.

Why? Because:

- the breath is *continually changing*
- attention tends to drift with sensation
- subtle discursiveness remains unchecked
- the meditator does not gain *mastery* over the object

Geshe Sopa’s target here is to refute the idea that:

“If I just sit quietly, watching the breath, śamatha will eventually arise.”

The text is explicit: **mere calm ≠ śamatha**.

Śamatha requires:

- sustained single-pointedness
- pliancy of mind *and* body
- full controllability of the object

Breath may *prepare* the mind, but it does not **complete** the causal chain.

*“Sitting calmly without thinking is a waste as it does not lead to śamatha.” is **textually justified** in this context. It is a warning against mistaking **absence of disturbance** for **acquired concentration**.*

Point 2 — Only an external, special object can function as a śamatha object

What the text is saying is:

Śamatha requires an object that is stable, well-defined, and fully subject to intentional control.

Internal processes fail this test.

An **externally defined “special object”** passes it.

That is why Geshe Sopa singles out:

- the **Body of the Buddha**
- or, more generally, a **clearly delineated visual form**

This is not because the Buddha image is “holy” in a devotional sense *here*, but because it is:

- conceptually bounded
- visually stable
- mentally reconstructible

- progressively refinable
- controllable in detail

This is a **functional argument**, not a devotional one.

Śamatha requires an externally defined object that the mind can learn to hold, stabilise, and fully govern.

The Body of the Buddha is presented as the **optimal** such object.

**Point 3 — The method of visualising the Buddha is the heart of the section
The Buddha-image method (diagram above)**

(a) Begin with an actual image

You start by **looking at a physical image** of the Buddha.

This anchors:

- proportion
- posture
- colour
- basic form

The text is clear: **you do not begin purely mentally.**

(b) Shift to a mentally constructed object

You then close your eyes and **reproduce the image mentally.**

At this stage:

- the image will be vague
- unstable
- incomplete

That is expected. Śamatha is not yet happening.

(c) Establish the image as in front of you

This is crucial and often missed.

The object is not:

- imagined “inside”
- dissolved into light
- merged with awareness

It is:

experienced as an object appearing in front of the mind.

This preserves subject–object structure, which is **essential for śamatha training.**

(d) Begin with one simple characteristic

- gold colour

- general outline
- seated posture

You hold **one feature only**. This is where *training* begins.

(e) If the characteristic changes, stop

This is one of the strongest instructions in the section. If:

- gold turns red
- shape blurs size shifts

You **do not correct it while continuing**. You:

1. stop
2. pause
3. reset
4. begin again

Why?

Because śamatha requires **full control**, not tolerance of drift. Allowing drift trains instability.

(f) Maintain the single characteristic without change

This is the first genuine appearance of śamatha-causation.

Here:

- effort becomes minimal
- attention stays voluntarily
- the object obeys intention

This is what the diagram above is illustrating.

(g) Gradually add characteristics

Only *after* mastery of one feature do you add:

- posture details
- facial features
- hand positions
- ornaments, etc.

At every stage:

- stability first
- complexity second

This is the **opposite** of casual visualisation.

Why the text is so uncompromising here

“Working through a process with a Buddha image is the only way to śamatha.”

— is **accurate for this text, in this context**, with one understood qualifier:

It is the only method being endorsed here as reliably causal for śamatha.

The section is deliberately excluding:

- vague mindfulness
- passive calm
- undirected awareness
- internal sensation focus

Because those do not train:

- precision
- stability
- mastery
- pliancy

Śamatha is **an acquired skill**, not a mood.

The deeper implication (why this matters later)

Quietly, this section is already preparing for **emptiness of self**, because:

- the meditator learns that *control is learned*
- attention is trained, not owned
- the “I” is not a natural controller
- stability is dependently produced

But that insight is **not yet analysed** — it is embodied first.

Chapter 3. Focusing the Mind on the Object of Meditation

Orientation. If Chapter 1 set the conditions and Chapter 2 wired in the live feedback loop (faults ↔ antidotes; powers ↔ engagements), Chapter 3 is the **stage-by-stage field manual**: how attention matures from first contact with the object to **effortless equipoise** and **pliancy**, the launchpad for sustained vipaśyanā. Read this chapter as a **process map with diagnostics**: each stage has a signature failure mode, a precise fix, and a measurable threshold for “ready to move on.”

Chapter 3 moves from *choosing* an object of meditation to the far more decisive question: **how the mind is actually trained on that object so that genuine śamatha can arise**. Tsongkhapa makes it clear that merely sitting quietly, or calming the mind without a clearly held object, does not produce śamatha. Śamatha is a *trained mental ability*, not a passive state.

The chapter is structured around three interrelated themes: the flawless method of focusing the mind, the elimination of flawed methods, and the appropriate length of meditation sessions. Running through all three is Tsongkhapa’s insistence on *precision, vigilance, and correct effort*.

The Goal: What Śamatha Actually Is

Śamatha is defined by **two inseparable qualities**:

single-pointed stability and **vivid mental clarity**. Stability alone is insufficient; clarity alone is insufficient. True śamatha is the capacity to remain effortlessly on the chosen object, for as long as one wishes, *without distraction and without dullness*. Physical or mental bliss may arise, but it is not a defining feature and must not be mistaken for attainment.

At this stage of the path, **stability is primary**. Clarity will naturally develop once the mind can remain settled. This is why Tsongkhapa repeatedly warns against methods that prioritise relaxation, passivity, or pleasant states.

The Flawless Method: Mindfulness and Introspection

The flawless method depends on two mental functions working together.

- **Mindfulness** is the power that *holds the object*. It is not analysis, reflection, or improvement of the image. Once the object is correctly established, mindfulness simply keeps it there; firmly, clearly, and without drift. Mindfulness fails the moment the object is forgotten, begins to waver or altered.
- **Introspection** (vigilance) is the monitoring faculty (the “mental spy”) that continuously checks whether mindfulness is functioning properly. It detects distraction, laxity, or the *incipient signs* of either, and immediately signals the need for correction.

Tsongkhapa is explicit: **introspection operates simultaneously with concentration**, not before or after it. One corner of the mind watches while the main attention remains on the object. This is not discursive thinking; it is a refined aspect of awareness that becomes increasingly subtle and non-intrusive with training.

The Object Must Be Held Exactly as Intended

When meditating on a visualised object (such as the body of the Buddha) the practitioner must **begin with a simple, clearly defined feature**, for example: *golden in colour*. That feature is held precisely as intended. If the colour changes, becomes vague, or uncertain, **the session is stopped immediately**, the visualisation **reset**, and practice begins again.

The same applies to size, posture, number, or orientation. If one Buddha becomes two, if seated becomes standing, if clarity degrades into ambiguity; this is not progress but deviation. Following these changes trains instability, not śamatha. Stop immediately, reset & begin again.

Tsongkhapa is unambiguous: **continuing with a corrupted or drifting object entrenches error**. Stopping, resetting, and beginning again is not failure; it is correct training.

This is why simply “watching the breath” or “resting the mind” may calm agitation but does not, by itself, produce śamatha. Without a *stable, well-defined object that can be held without alteration*, the mind is **not** being trained in the skill śamatha requires.

The Two Great Obstacles: Laxity and Excitement

The two principal obstacles correspond exactly to the two qualities of śamatha.

- **Excitement** undermines stability. In its coarse form, the mind leaves the object entirely. In its subtle form, attention remains on the object but is pulled toward something else.
- **Laxity** undermines clarity. In its coarse form it leads to dullness or sleep. In its subtle form it can masquerade as deep meditation (stable, quiet, even pleasant) yet lacking vividness and strength. This subtle laxity is especially dangerous. Tsongkhapa repeatedly warns that practitioners can meditate for years in this state, mistaking it for progress, while genuine śamatha never arises.

Eliminating Flawed Methods

Tsongkhapa systematically dismantles several common misunderstandings.

- He rejects the idea that *relaxation itself* is meditation. Over-relaxation produces stability without clarity; a refined form of dullness. Conversely, gripping the object too tightly may preserve clarity but generate agitation.
- He also rejects the claim that “non-thinking” or “objectless meditation” is easier or superior. Even these approaches require mindfulness and introspection; without them, the mind simply drifts or sinks. The absence of discursive thought is not the presence of śamatha.
- The correct balance is likened to tuning a musical instrument: neither too tight nor too loose. Finding this balance cannot be done conceptually; it is learned only through experience, guided by vigilant introspection.

Length of Sessions: Training Without Aversion

Finally, Tsongkhapa addresses session length. For beginners, **multiple short sessions are strongly preferred**. Ending a session while it is still going well builds enthusiasm and continuity. Over-long sessions lead to exhaustion, aversion, and unrecognised faults.

Session length is not fixed. A session lasts **only as long as mindfulness and introspection remain effective**. When dullness or distraction appears, one stops, resets, and returns later.

As mindfulness and introspection strengthen, sessions naturally lengthen. The measure of progress is not duration, but *quality of attention*.

What This Chapter Is Really Teaching

Chapter 3 makes a single, uncompromising point: **śamatha is a trained skill, not a mood, not a feeling, and not mere calm.**

It arises only when the mind is repeatedly trained to hold a clearly defined object, exactly as intended, with balanced effort, under continuous introspective supervision. Anything else (however pleasant, quiet, or spacious) may be calming, but it is not śamatha.

Chapter 4. Dealing with Laxity and Excitement

The chapter's central move: turn meditation into a feedback loop

Chapter 4 frames practice as two questions:

1. **What to do when laxity and excitement occur**
2. **What to do when meditation is free of them** (i.e., don't "fix" a mind that's already balanced).

The key point is that śamatha is not "being calm." It is *calm + stability + clarity*, and the chapter treats laxity/excitement as **balancing errors** you must learn to detect early and correct precisely—especially in their subtle forms.

1) Recognise the "thief" before you can stop it

The chapter insists you must learn the *defining characteristics* of the obstacles; otherwise they slip in unnoticed (the gatekeeper/thief analogy).

For **excitement**, Tsongkhapa quotes Asaṅga's definition: it is an **unquiet state of mind**, a **derivative of attachment**, that **pursues pleasant objects** and blocks meditative serenity.

Geshe Sopa then makes it psychologically precise: excitement's object is "attractive" only because the mind imputes it; the subjective feel is scattering; and its function is to interrupt stable abiding.

Śamatha–vipaśyanā interlock (emptiness-of-self emphasis): excitement is not just "restlessness." It is attachment's outward pull—*which depends on a tacit sense of a real 'me' who needs a real 'pleasant thing'*. Later, vipaśyanā (especially self-emptiness) cuts the fuel line; but right now, śamatha trains you to **see the pull early** and **not obey it**.

2) The engine of the whole chapter: mindfulness + introspection

This is where Chapter 4 becomes your answer to "forgetting the instructions."

- **Mindfulness** is literally "recollect/remember": keeping the object continuously present. It is named as the antidote to **forgetting the instructions**.
- **Introspection** is the "mental spy" that watches the quality of meditation while attention stays on the object—catching both sinking (laxity) and scattering (excitement), ideally *before* they fully arise.

Tsongkhapa's causal claim is crucial for you: mindfulness is the most important cause of introspection. When mindfulness "dwells at the gate," introspection appears.

So if you forget instructions, the fix is not "try harder later." It is: **strengthen mindfulness at the gate so introspection can do its job in real time**.

3) Subtle laxity: the "good relaxation" trap

Chapter 4 explicitly criticises approaches that say "don't hold an object; just relax" or "relax the mind and don't hold too tightly." It says that if focus is too relaxed, **subtle laxity will always be there**, gradually increasing into dullness—so you can meditate for years and true śamatha will not arise.

And it gives the balancing principle: too tight → clarity but excitement; too loose → stability but laxity; the skill is finding the middle where both clarity and stability coexist.

4) Apply antidotes immediately—especially against subtle faults

The chapter says people often notice slight laxity/excitement and dismiss it as “not a big deal.” Tsongkhapa says they are wrong: ignoring subtle manifestations is very problematic.

This is a defining habit you are building: *small correction early* rather than *big rescue late*.

5) Intention (application) is the switch that makes antidotes happen

Chapter 4 then treats the next failure mode: you recognise the fault, but don't act.

It explains **intention** as the mental factor that applies the mind, drawing it to virtue/non-virtue/neutral—like a magnet pulls filings. In śamatha, intention propels you to apply antidotes.

Therefore intention is sometimes called “**application**,” and in that sense it is the antidote to **not applying antidotes**: you recognise, then you immediately intend to eradicate, and that intention gathers the appropriate remedy.

6) Concrete example: how to treat laxity

The chapter gives a very practical laxity protocol:

- Laxity often begins when the mind tries too hard to withdraw from stimulation; your hold loosens; subtle laxity arises; momentum worsens toward sleep if not countered.
- **Remedy**: briefly direct the mind outward to something **joyful** or **bright** that stimulates **faith**, not attachment—Buddha image, spiritual teacher, bright sunlight/light—then return to the original object with “freshened, tightened concentration.”
- **Warning**: when sinking, don't choose sorrow-inducing contemplations (death, impermanence, suffering of saṃsāra) as the energiser.

Very detailed instructions for applying antidotes (designed for “forgetting the instructions”)

Everything below is built directly on Chapter 4's chain:

Mindfulness (don't forget) → Introspection (detect) → Intention/application (switch) → Specific antidote (repair) → Equanimity (stop repairing when fixed).

1) The two-sentence “instructions” to memorise (so you don't forget)

Use this *every sit*:

- “**Mindfulness holds the object continuously.**”
- “**One corner of the mind checks: laxity or excitement?**”

That's the whole chapter in operational form.

2) Pre-session drill (60 seconds) — make “remembering” automatic

Right before you begin:

- **Name the object**: “My object is X.”
- **Name the two faults**: “The dangers are laxity and excitement.”
- **Pre-load the switch**: “If detected, I apply immediately.” (This is intention/application.)

This matters because when you're already drifting, the mind is least able to “recall a teaching.” You're building an autopilot.

3) The live loop: **HOLD–CHECK–APPLY–RELEASE** (repeat)

Run this loop gently for the whole session:

A. HOLD (mindfulness)

Keep the object present; mindfulness is “recollect/remember.”

B. CHECK (introspection as the mental spy)

Very lightly, “examine again and again” whether faults have arisen or are about to arise.

C. DIAGNOSE in one word

- Pulled outward toward attractive thoughts/memories/plans → “excitement” (attachment-derivative).
- Sinking, dimming, loosening, fogging → “laxity.” (Often starts subtle.)

D. APPLY (intention as the switch)

The moment you detect it, generate the intention to eradicate immediately—this is “application.”

E. SPECIFIC REMEDY (do the smallest effective correction)

• Laxity remedy (Chapter 4 gives this explicitly):

1. Briefly shift to **light / Buddha qualities / teacher / bright sunlight** (faith-joy, not attachment).
2. As soon as the mind brightens, **return to the original object** with “freshened, tightened concentration.”
3. Don’t choose sorrow themes when sinking.

• Excitement remedy (given as principle + definition):

The key is to counter the mind’s wilful straying toward attractive objects (attachment’s pull) and restore stable abiding.

Practically, do a *small tightening* of placement (clearer contact with the object) and reduce outward leaning. You’re not aiming for “more relaxation” (which risks subtle laxity); you’re aiming for the balanced middle where clarity and stability coexist.

F. RELEASE (equanimity / stop applying)

When the mind is back in balance, stop fiddling. Applying antidotes when not needed is itself a primary obstacle, and equanimity counters it.

4) The “forgetting instructions” upgrade: make introspection show up sooner

Chapter 4’s gold standard is not merely recognising faults once they are strong, but recognising **their subtle signs before they arise**, so you stop them before fruition.

So train this way:

- **Shorter sessions at first** (so you practise the loop cleanly). The text explicitly recommends shorter sessions when you have less facility with antidotes, lengthening as skill increases.
- **A simple cadence:** every minute or so, a tiny “check” without leaving the object. Over time, it becomes continuous, like background awareness.
- **One cue phrase** (so you don’t “forget”):
“Gatekeeper + spy.”
 Mindfulness at the gate → introspection appears.

Diagnostics and pitfalls (Chapter 4’s own warnings)

- **Pitfall: “Good relaxation is good meditation.”** The chapter says this leads to persistent subtle laxity; years can pass without true śamatha.
- **Pitfall: ignoring slight faults.** Subtle laxity/excitement must be corrected immediately; dismissing them is “very problematic.”
- **Diagnostic: you cannot be sure your meditation is free of faults without strong introspection.** Otherwise you can meditate a long time and not know subtle faults dominated.

Pocket reminder (for the top of your meditation page)

“Mindfulness remembers the object. Introspection spies the drift. Intention applies the smallest remedy. When balanced, stop applying.”

1) Cushion Card

The whole practice loop (repeat gently):

HOLD → CHECK → NAME → APPLY → RETURN → RELEASE

- **HOLD (Mindfulness):** keep the object continuously present—no drifting, no re-examining.
- **CHECK (Introspection):** like a “mental spy,” repeatedly check for laxity/excitement (or their early signs).
- **NAME (1 word):** “laxity” or “excitement.” (Don’t analyse—just label and respond.)
- **APPLY (Intention = the switch):** decide *immediately* to correct (no delay).
- **RETURN:** back to the original object with “tempered strength.”
- **RELEASE (Equanimity):** if there’s no laxity/excitement, drop the effort to fix—just remain steadily on the object (without letting go).

Antidote menu (minimum effective dose):

- **If LAXITY (dark/heavy/unclear):**
 - **Gross:** briefly energise with *light / Buddha image / teacher / sunlight* (joy of faith, not attachment), then return with tightened concentration.
 - **Don’t** use sorrow objects (death/impermanence/saṃsāra suffering) as the energiser when sinking.
 - **Slight:** don’t change objects—just strengthen attention on the same object.
- **If EXCITEMENT (restless outward pull):**
 - Re-establish the **middle:** neither too tight nor too loose; keep the object with stable “tempered strength,” alert and delighted (not discouraged).

One-line cure for “forgetting instructions”:

“Mindfulness at the gate → introspection appears.”

2) Training Card (“how to apply antidotes” in detail)

A. The chapter’s logic in one chain (memorise this)

- **Fault 1. (laziness)** (not wanting to start or continue) → **Antidotes:**
 - **faith** (confidence in the value/benefit of concentration)
 - **aspiration** (wanting to practice)
 - **effort** (actually applying energy)
 - **pliancy** (the ease that grows from practice and then sustains it)

- **Fault 2 (forgetting instructions)** → antidote **mindfulness**.
- **Fault 3 (laxity/excitement)** → antidote **introspection** (vigilant knowing).
- **Fault 4 (not applying antidotes)** → antidote **strong intention** to apply immediately.
- **Fault 5 (over-applying)** → antidote **equanimity** (stop fixing when not needed).

This is the “operating system” of Chapter 4.

B. Pre-session: remove the forgetting before it starts (60–90 seconds)

1. **Name the object clearly** (one sentence): “My object is ____.”
2. **State the job** (one sentence): “Hold it continuously (mindfulness) and check quality (introspection).”
3. **Pre-load the two corrections** (so you don’t have to remember later):
 - If sinking → “light / Buddha / teacher / sunlight.”
 - If restless → “return to the object with tempered strength.”

Why this works: mindfulness is explicitly said to be the key cause of introspection; when mindfulness is present, introspection “appears.”

C. In-session: the 6-step antidote protocol (use exactly this order)

Step 1 — HOLD (Mindfulness = non-forgetful continuity)

Mindfulness here means holding the familiar object clearly, continuously, without distraction; once fixed, you hold it “without new examination.”

Common mistake: “I remember what my teacher said about the object” is *not* enough; what matters is the *continuous holding without the slightest distraction*.

Step 2 — CHECK (Introspection = the “mental spy”)

Introspection is the quality-control system: repeatedly check if laxity/excitement are present, imminent, or showing subtle precursors.

Goal standard: train until you can identify faults **as they arise** and even when “on the verge of arising,” so you can stop them before fruition.

Step 3 — NAME (quick diagnosis)

- **Laxity:** darkness/unclear object, slack hold, sinking.
 - **Excitement:** restless outward pull, mind straying.
- (Keep it very simple: you’re not doing analysis here; you’re steering.)

Step 4 — APPLY (Intention/application = the switch)

When a fault is detected, the antidote must *actually happen*. Tsongkhapa/Geshe Sopa explicitly make **strong intention** the remedy for “non-application.”

So you train a crisp internal gesture: “**Correct now.**”

Step 5 — REMEDY (choose the smallest effective correction)

A) Laxity remedies (graded):

(1) Slight laxity (brief, infrequent):

Stay on the same object; simply strengthen attention—don’t shift objects.

(2) Gross/repeated laxity:

Suspend the original object *briefly* and energise with something that stimulates **joy of faith** (not attachment): Buddha image, teacher, sunlight/light. Then immediately return and hold the original object with “freshened, tightened concentration.”

Hard rule: when sinking, don’t choose sorrow objects (death/impermanence/saṃsāra suffering) as the energiser—they don’t immediately generate joy at that moment.

Bonus (very useful): brief analytic “wake-up”

The text even allows a short burst of analytic reasoning (including emptiness-analysis) to “extend the mind outward and activate it,” precisely as a remedy for dull sinking—then return to single-pointedness.

B) Excitement remedy (calibration principle):

The instruction is to hold the object in the *middle way of effort*: not too weak (risk laxity), not too tight (risk scattering); keep spirits high; remain alert and delighted in practice.

Step 6 — RELEASE (Equanimity = stop fixing)

When the mind is on the object **without** laxity/excitement, applying antidotes is itself a fault. Relax the effort to fix, but **do not** release your hold on the object; continue with “tempered strength.”

D. Specific training to cure “forgetting the instructions”

1. Use the Shantideva “gate” cue as your whole mnemonic:

“Mindfulness at the gate → introspection appears.”

2. Practice “check again and again” (micro-checks)

The text explicitly defines preserving introspection as examining body/mind “again and again,” which also reinvigorates mindfulness.

3. Shorter sessions until the loop is automatic

Short sessions are recommended when you have less facility with antidotes; as facility increases, session length can increase.

4. Treat subtle laxity as the silent saboteur

If you hold too loosely, subtle laxity remains even when things feel fine; it delays perfect concentration for a long time.

Pocket reminder for the bottom of the page

Hold (mindfulness). Spy (introspection). Switch (intention). Fix minimally. Return. If clear—stop fixing (equanimity).

Getting Started with Śamatha on Śākyamuni (imagery-light, action-focused)

Key principle (don’t get stuck on “visualising”):

Begin with **recognition**, not a photo-like picture. Your first job is simply to **recognise the object again and again**—even if the image is vague and lasts only a few seconds. Use the phrase: “*I’m holding the idea/sign of the Buddha, not a photograph.*”

The core training drill: look → close → refresh

Use a **real support** (statue or picture) at eye level. The fastest way to build the mental sign is a repeated cycle:

1. **Look (10–15 sec)** — soft gaze on a *single* feature; don't stare.
 2. **Close (2–5 sec)** — hold only that feature; if helpful, use a very light label: “*Buddha... Buddha...*”
 3. **Refresh (5–8 sec)** — open eyes and re-imprint gently.
- Repeat **25–35 cycles in 10 minutes**. When the image fades or changes, **don't chase or repair**—simply refresh from the real image. Fast resets are the training.

Choose one “seed feature” (don't try to hold the whole Buddha)

Pick a feature that is easy to recognise and hard to lose. For Śākyamuni (golden image), start with one (in order):

1. **golden face oval** (no details)
2. **urna as a small bright point** (between brows)
3. **raised right hand shape** (palm facing you)

Stay with one seed feature until it stabilises; only then add detail.

If imagery is very weak (aphantasia-friendly)

Some minds don't generate pictures easily. Don't fight it—use what is available:

- **spatial sense:** “Buddha is in front of me, upright, about this big.”
- **felt sense:** presence, calm, warmth, gold radiance.
- **meaning:** embodiment of awakening/compassion as a simple knowing.

You can still train stability and clarity; clarity may be **lucid knowing**, not sharp imagery.

Two accelerators

- **Afterimage method:** look 15–20 sec, close eyes, use the afterimage as the starting sign, refresh when it fades.
- **Make it bigger/nearer:** imagine the seed feature larger (e.g., face the size of a plate) and closer (about 1 metre in front).

Progression rule (prevents frustration)

Baseline holds < **5 seconds are normal**. Progress comes from **many clean repetitions**, not forcing duration. “Level up” only when you can do **~20 clean reps** where you genuinely recognise the object each time. Then increase **one variable only**:

- hold time 5 sec → 6–8 sec, **or**
- reduce refresh time slightly, **or**
- add one detail (face oval + urna point).

Never increase two variables at once.



Why this matters in Vol 4 terms:

Tsongkhapa and the Indian masters emphasise that success depends on **accurate assessment and correct response**—apply antidotes when needed, otherwise remain in equanimity. The point is not scholasticism: śamatha makes the mind **serviceable** and becomes a foundation for further attainments.

Chapter 4. Alternative

Orientation.

Chs. 1–3 built your steering system (conditions, feedback, stages). **Chapter 4 is about what happens when that system starts working**—the emergence of **pliancy** (ease, serviceability) and the cluster of experiences that often come with near-śamatha: **bliss, clarity, and non-conceptual quiet**. The chapter’s real question isn’t “Are these good?” (they are); it is “**How do I relate to them so they help vipaśyanā rather than become a cul-de-sac?**”

Core reminder: **stability serves seeing; seeing purifies stability**. Pliancy is the sign your mind can now serve analysis without fraying.

1) What “pliancy” actually is (and isn’t)

- **Mental pliancy:** The attention system feels **compliant and eager**—it takes the object instantly and stays there **pleasantly**, without white-knuckle effort. Adjustments are feather-touch.
- **Physical pliancy:** The body feels **light, unencumbered**; posture is easy to maintain; ordinary aches recede.
- **Functional test (not a mood):** After a clean placement, you can **prolong** a bright hold; when you do short analysis and stop, the mind **re-stabilises itself**.

Not pliancy: pleasant heaviness, hazy stillness, or “time gone by” without a crisp object. That’s **subtle laxity**, not the serviceable ease we want.

2) The three frequent co-arising experiences—benefits and risks

1. Bliss/rapture.

- **Benefit:** Energies, counteracts dullness; makes returning to the seat attractive.
- **Risk:** Attachment (“this is it!”), chasing sensations, insomnia.
- **Relationship:** Treat as **weather**—note, neither grasp nor resist; return to plan.

2. Clarity/brightness.

- **Benefit:** Vivid object; thoughts thin out; introspection sees micro-shifts early.
- **Risk:** Covert **agitation in disguise** (tension behind eyes/forehead).
- **Relationship:** Keep the **softness dial** in play; clarity without pressure.

3. Non-conceptual quiet.

- **Benefit:** Concepts don’t dominate; space to “just know.”
- **Risk:** Mistaking **blankness** for equipoise.
- **Relationship:** Confirm the object remains **distinct**; if edges blur, brighten a notch.

Rule of thumb: If the experience leaves the mind **more willing to rest**, it’s helpful; if it makes you **chase**, shorten the session, ground, and reset.

3) Recognising you’re “near calm-abiding”

- **Effort drops:** the object stays with minimal doing; micro-adjustments are light.
- **Recovery latency is tiny:** slips are caught **as they begin**.
- **Sessions become pleasant:** you end **brighter and kinder** than you began.
- **Post-analysis rebound:** short insight leaves stability **sweeter**, not frayed.
- **Off-cushion carry:** a trace of composure persists; reactivity softens.

If these are present consistently, you're in the **late stages** (7–9) of the nine-stage map (Ch. 3) and Chapter-4 instructions fit you.

4) Stabilising pliancy without reifying it

- **Keep both dials alive:** If joy swells, remember the **softness** dial; if things feel syrupy, lift **brightness** by one notch.
- **Practice deliberate non-application:** After a good correction, schedule **60–120 seconds** of hands-off resting. This prevents fussy over-steering.
- **Guard the frame:** Start and end with **bodhicitta** so the mind understands: *this ease is for others' welfare*. Pride and grasping evaporate in that atmosphere.
- **Normalise the unusual:** Lights, vibrations, “nimitta-like”¹ crispness—label “**expected side-effects**” and resume plan.

5) Using pliancy to fuel vipāśyanā (emptiness of self first)

Now śamatha can **carry** analysis. Keep it **short, bright, conclusive**:

The three-phase loop (repeat 1–3x):

1. **Settle (śamatha):** 3–5 minutes of clean placement; confirm edges are vivid.
2. **Look (vipāśyanā on the person):**
 - **Owner check:** Where is the “I” that owns body/mind? Only changing parts and processes appear + a label.
 - **Designation check:** The person functions **by convention**—no core apart from basis + labelling.
Stop as soon as **unfindability** is clear—don't “polish” the insight conceptually.
3. **Soak (śamatha):** Rest 3–5 minutes with the flavour of **mere designation**; let stability sweeten.

Ratios that work: In a 30–40 min session, **~70–80% placement**, **~20–30% analysis**, split into **micro-windows**. If post-insight stability degrades, shorten the analysis window.

6) Advanced diagnostics (quick self-tests)

- **Bliss vs. subtle laxity:** Can you **read a paragraph** on your object (distinct start, middle, end) without fuzz? If not, brighten.
- **Clarity vs. covert tension:** Scan eyes/forehead/jaw. If tight, lengthen the exhale, widen the field for two breaths, then return.
- **Non-conceptuality vs. blankness:** Can you **intentionally sharpen** the object's edges on demand? If not, you're in blankness; raise brightness and shorten sits.

7) Common pitfalls at this stage (and kind fixes)

- **Falling in love with rapture:** Cap session length; add a **grounding close** (feel weight in seat/feet). Take a short walk afterwards.
- **“I've arrived” conceit:** Dedicate merits outward; remember: **this clarity serves seeing**.

¹ “Nimitta-like” describes the visual phenomena encountered in deep meditation, or jhana, which can appear as soft, misty, or flickering lights, star-like pinpoints, or a luminous disk or sphere. These are positive signs of progress, indicating sustained concentration on the breath, and can evolve into brighter, more stable forms that become integral to achieving meditative bliss and deeper insight.

- **Over-analysing the insight phase:** Insight windows are **surgical, not discursive**. Look → see → stop → soak.
- **Lifestyle mismatch:** Too much stimulation (news/notifications), irregular sleep, or strong foods late in the day will spike agitation; simplify inputs and timing.

8) A stage-appropriate session plan (30–45 minutes)

1. **Frame (1 min):** Refuge–bodhicitta; name today’s emphasis (“ease without dullness” / “clarity without tension”).
2. **Placement (12–15 min):** Work brightness/softness; confirm quick recovery.
3. **Micro-insight (3–5 min):** Owner/Designation check on the **person**; stop on first clean taste of unfindability.
4. **Soak (8–10 min):** Rest in placement flavoured by **mere designation**; include 60–120s of **non-application**.
5. **(Optional) Second loop:** Repeat steps 3–4 once.
6. **Dedication (30–60s):** Place the fruits in service of others.

Quality checks:

- Ending state is **brighter, warmer, softer**.
- You look forward to the **next** sit (joy intact).
- Off-cushion, you can do **one-breath resets** that re-evoked the flavor.

9) Off-cushion supports that matter now

- **Joy hygiene:** Start activities with a micro-gratitude note; joy is pliancy’s **fuel**.
- **Single-tasking reps:** 5–10 minute bouts where you do just one thing with the same bright/soft tone.
- **Input trimming:** One fewer stream (social/news) drops agitation **immediately**.
- **Kind body care:** Light meals at night, steady sleep, brief daylight walks; your nervous system is the **hardware** of attention.

10) Two-week micro-curriculum for Chapter 4

- **Days 1–3:** Confirm you can **restore** crispness on command (anti-laxity drills).
- **Days 4–6:** Practice **deliberate non-application** daily (60–120s after a clean correction).
- **Days 7–10:** Insert **two** micro-insight windows (60–120s each) aimed at **self of the person**; verify that post-insight placement is **cleaner**.
- **Days 11–14:** Keep ratios; add **owner-check during daily tasks** (one-breath: “mere I”), then release.

Pocket reminder

Ease → See → Soak.

Ease (pliancy: bright, soft, willing). See (the person as **mere designation**, no findable core). Soak (rest in that flavour; dedicate it outward).

Work Chapter 4 like this and pliancy stops being a fascinating side-trip and becomes what it’s meant to be: **a reliable, pleasant platform for insight**; a mind that happily rests and readily recognises the **self** as conventionally designated, empty of inherent existence.

Chapter 5. Attaining Attaining Śamatha

Part 1 — The training machinery (how stable attention is built)

1) Why the text uses “stages”

Tsongkhapa’s point is practical: the stages give you **milestones** and a **measure**—what antidotes are working, what obstacles are still winning, and therefore what to adjust next.

The deep message here is: **your job is not to “have a nice meditation”**; your job is to **train specific capacities** (placing, keeping, returning, deepening, balancing), in order, until they become *natural*.

2) The nine stages (what actually changes from stage to stage)

Stage 1 — mental placement

You first learn to place attention on the internal object. The text explicitly uses Buddha-image practice because Buddha image can lead to enlightenment: look at a statue/painting, bring it to mind, look again, and repeat—accepting vagueness at first.

It then warns: when you lose the object, don’t drift into “whatever appears”; that trains the habit of mental wandering. Instead, reset and begin again. This can take a long time.

Practice cue: “Lose it → return immediately. Don’t tour the mind.”

Stage 2 — continuous placement

The difference is **duration**: even a minute is meaningful early on, and “it’s worse than usual” is often just that you are finally noticing distraction.

Practice cue: treat “noticing distraction” as progress, not failure.

Stage 3 — patched placement

You still slip, but you can “patch” quickly. Here the text makes the hinge explicit: the key change is **how long you remain distracted**, and it highlights **mindfulness + introspection** as the special antidotes.

Practice cue: shorten “time lost” more than you chase “perfect clarity.”

Stage 4 — close placement

Now you actively **re-place and then stay**: strong effort to remain, distraction no longer yanks you fully off the object; “mental wandering ceases” in the gross sense, and mindfulness becomes fully developed in strength. **Mindfulness and Introspection.**

Practice cue: stop celebrating “I’m not distracted” and start refining “how stable is the placement?”

Stage 5 — taming

A psychological turn: delight in concentration grows from reflecting on its benefits, and this *delight* helps tame gross laxity. Here the text’s technical emphasis shifts: from this stage onward, **introspection becomes primary** because the danger is now over-internalising → sinking.

It also adds a concrete sign of the change in values: the “ten signs” (5 sense objects, three poisons, and 2 sex-marks) are regarded as disadvantageous, so the mind is less stirred by them.

Practice cue: “From here, laxity is the sly enemy.”

Stage 6 — pacification

From seeing the faults of distraction, reluctance to meditate falls away, and **introspection** becomes so sharp it can cut off disturbances *before* they take hold—watching what is coming, about to come, or trying to come.

Practice cue: aim for *pre-emptive* correction, not late correction.

Stage 7 — complete pacification

Subtler discomforts (uneasiness, lethargy, sleepiness, subtle attachment, etc.) are pacified quickly when they arise; and a new factor is stressed: **perseverance** that subdues even subtle laxity/excitement.

Practice cue: “small faults matter most now.”

Stage 8 — one-pointed attention

No interruption by laxity/excitement, but some effort still needed to keep it continuous. **Perseverance** still.

Practice cue: effort becomes “light steering,” not “hard holding.”

Stage 9 — balanced placement

Equanimity: effortless stability without fear of the two faults; this becomes the immediate cause of *śamatha*, but still *not yet śamatha* itself.

3) The six forces (how you actually move through the stages)

Tsongkhapa maps the stages to forces so you can diagnose what’s missing:

- **Hearing (study)** → stage 1 (you must have learned the method first).
- **Reflection** → stage 2 (repeatedly placing again and again builds continuity).
- **Mindfulness** → stages 3–4 (first: pull back; then: prevent straying).
- **Introspection** → stages 5–6 (the “mental spy” detecting faults and early signs).
- **Perseverance** → stages 7–8 (immediate response to even tiny signs; beware subtle laxity can hide).
- **Acquaintance (familiarity)** → stage 9 (equilibrium becomes natural and effortless).

This is very “action eyes”: you can ask at any time, **Which force is weak right now?** and that tells you what to train.

4) The four attentions (the feel of practice changes as you progress)

Asaṅga’s schema is used to describe the *texture* of attention:

- **Tight focus** (stages 1–2): intense, tense, like walking a cliff edge; you can’t let it lapse.
- **Intermittent focus** (stages 3–7): continuity grows but gets interrupted.
- **Uninterrupted focus** (stage 8): no breaks from laxity/excitement, but still effort.
- **Spontaneous focus** (stage 9): effortless stabilisation.

Then it gives a fierce practicality lesson: **continuous practice matters**—Āryaśūra’s “fire doesn’t arise from friction if you repeatedly slack off.”

But it also balances that: daily modest practice still “plants the seed” and builds habit.

Practice cue (gentle but strict): “No drama. No long gaps. A little every day beats occasional heroics.”

Part 2 — The assessment machinery (what counts as śamatha, and what doesn't)

1) The big dividing line: “stage 9 is not yet śamatha”

Tsongkhapa anticipates the classic mistake: “If I can stay effortlessly on the object without laxity/excitement, isn't that śamatha?” He answers: **what distinguishes actual śamatha is physical + mental pliancy.**

And he gets very blunt: even if you have stage 9, without that special pliancy you have not attained śamatha—*much less vipaśyanā*.

So the chapter forces a kind of honesty:

“Calm, clear, non-discursive, even blissful” is not yet the finish line.

2) What “pliancy” means (and why it matters)

Pliancy is described as more than flexibility: a subtle “wind-energy” (prāṇa) that clears hindrances so body and mind become light, workable, and cooperative.

It also explains the sequence: **mental pliancy first**, then energy moves through the body, leading to physical pliancy; and physical bliss arises first, then becomes a cause for mental bliss.

It warns again: early “gross” bliss/pliancy can occur on stage 9; only when it becomes subtle and stable together with physical and mental pliancy is it śamatha.

Practice cue: don't chase bliss. Let it cool into steadiness. If excitement about bliss disrupts placement, it's not yet the “serviceable” mind the chapter is pointing to.

3) The five marks (how you know you've actually arrived)

The chapter then gives concrete markers, explicitly saying: “You will recognise these signs in yourself.”

1. Some degree of **form-realm mind**, plus **physical & mental pliancy**, and **single-pointedness**.
2. Ability to purify afflictions via the **mundane path** (calm/coarse comparison) or the **supramundane path** (truths/emptiness etc.).
3. When you begin to focus, **equipoise + pliancy arise quickly**; if not, you're likely overestimating.
4. The “five desire-realm obstacles” largely don't occur: attraction to sense objects and the associated desire-realm afflictions fade dramatically.
5. Even after meditation, some pliancy remains; daily activity becomes easier and the mind stays steadier.

This is exactly your “review” half: it prevents both **inflation** (“I've got it!”) and **wrong criteria** (“I felt blank and peaceful, so that must be emptiness/insight”).

Śamatha–vipaśyanā interplay (the chapter's critical guard-rail)

This chapter quietly protects the “wisdom chapter” work you're heading toward: it insists that **non-discursive calm is not automatically emptiness**.

It says: you stabilise the mind so that it becomes a powerful instrument; then you apply it to the *conclusion* of analysis of emptiness (and that can become profound non-discursive awareness), but you must not confuse “blank clarity” with wisdom.

It explicitly rejects the Hashang-style idea that emptiness is just emptying the mind of thought and having no object.

And it clarifies that “objectless/signless/empty” mean **no inherently existing object/characteristic**, not “staring into a blank.”

In your terms (emptiness-of-self emphasis):

Śamatha trains *non-obedience* to the self’s cravings and aversions (especially the subtle “I need...” behind excitement). Vipāśyanā later cuts the root by analysing that “I” and finding it unlocatable—then śamatha provides the stability to remain on that conclusion without slipping into discursiveness.

Meditation tips threaded through Chapter 5 (very practical)

1) If imagery is weak: stay faithful to stage 1’s method

The chapter’s own example for Buddha visualisation is precisely “look, bring to mind, look again, repeat” and accept vagueness.

So “<5 seconds” is not a flaw—it’s literally what stage 1 predicts.

2) Your daily “micro-drill” for stage 1–2

- 10–20 cycles: look at one seed-feature (colour / face oval / urna / hand), close eyes briefly, refresh, repeat.
- Measure success by *recognition + return*, not vividness.

3) Stage-based antidote emphasis (a clean rule of thumb)

- Stages 1–2: win by **short sessions + relentless returning**.
- Stages 3–4: win by **mindfulness strengthening** (return fast; then prevent gross wandering).
- Stages 5–6: win by **introspection** (catch sinking early; apply antidotes before it forms).
- Stages 7–8: win by **perseverance** applied to tiny signs.
- Stage 9: win by **familiarity**—stop muscling it.

4) Don’t make the chapter’s “review criteria” into anxiety

The chapter uses the signs to prevent false claims, not to make you self-monitor obsessively. It says the stages help you “make adjustments accordingly.”

So: review briefly *after* the session; during the session, do the training.

Chapter 6. Śamatha as Part of the Path

What this chapter is really doing

Chapter 6 answers the question: “**Now that śamatha is achieved, what next?**” It refuses the very natural misunderstanding that “effortless, vivid stability” is itself liberation. Śamatha is a *power tool*, but it does not uproot greed, hatred, jealousy, etc. by itself; liberation depends on **vipaśyanā** (wisdom/insight), and śamatha’s main purpose is to make that wisdom possible and effective.

It then lays out two tracks you can follow **after** achieving śamatha:

- a **mundane path** that *temporarily subdues* afflictions (suppression, not uprooting), and
- a **supramundane path** that *permanently uproots* afflictions through liberating insight.

This is the chapter’s backbone: **two paths, two goals, one necessary foundation** (śamatha).

Part 1 — The fork in the road after śamatha

1) Two paths, “and no others”

Asaṅga’s point is quoted directly: once the yogi has “attention” (i.e., śamatha and the small delight of elimination), there are **two ways to progress and no others**—mundane or supramundane.

2) Why śamatha is not enough (but still indispensable)

Tsongkhapa makes a sharp clarification that many people repeat incorrectly: it’s not quite accurate to say “śamatha suppresses afflictions and vipaśyanā uproots them.” Rather, **śamatha alone does not fully suppress even temporarily unless it is combined with mundane insight**; and **analysis alone** (without the stable focus of śamatha) cannot do the suppressing job either. You need both.

So the chapter is quietly training you out of a common binary mistake:

- *blank stability without discernment* is not the path, and
- *discernment without stabilisation* can’t hold the mind on the conclusion long enough to transform it.

3) Śamatha makes analytic meditation “non-disturbing”

A key marker of readiness for insight practice is described with the fish-and-water analogy: when śamatha is strong, analytic meditation can “swim” through examination without churning the stability. That is, analysis no longer destroys your calm—this shows that vipaśyanā practice can begin properly.

Practice cue: after a stable sit, do a *brief analytic pulse*; if the mind becomes ragged and scattered, you’re not yet ready for long analysis. If analysis remains bright and stable, the instrument is maturing.

Part 2 — The mundane path (calmness & coarseness)

This chapter’s big “new content” (relative to Chapters 4–5) is not more śamatha technique. It is: **how śamatha is used on the mundane path to suppress desire-realm attachment**, using the famous “calm/coarse” comparison meditations.

1) Why śamatha is required even for the mundane path

Tsongkhapa stresses: even to proceed in mundane purification, you must go beyond the ninth stage and attain actual śamatha; mere preparatory stability is not enough.

2) The six attentions (plus the “seventh” result)

The Śrāvaka Levels lists **seven attentions**, but Tsongkhapa explains the first six are causal and the seventh is the *result* (the actual first meditative absorption).

These attentions are all **analytical meditative states** (this matters: “mundane vipaśyanā” is still vipaśyanā in the sense of analysis/discernment, though not emptiness-realisation).

Here is the action-flow of the six:

1. Discernment of characteristics

Study/learn the qualities of desire realm vs first form realm. It is preparatory—afflictions not yet subdued; not yet “actual insight.”

2. Arisal of belief

Meditation deepens the analysis until it becomes integrated into your core beliefs; Śrāvaka Levels explicitly treats this as a kind of vipaśyanā.

(These first two correspond to something like the preparatory work of the first two paths: accumulation/preparation, and in them śamatha and vipaśyanā are cultivated sequentially—analyse, then take the conclusion as the śamatha object.)

3. Isolation

The **direct antidote** to gross desire-realm afflictions—freedom from the gross mental afflictions.

4. Delight (or withdrawal)

Antidote to intermediate desire-realm afflictions. It includes joy, but also a warning: too much joy can tip into distraction, so a quality of “withdrawal” is needed.

5. Analysis (testing)

Now the danger is **premature certainty**: because gross/intermediate afflictions are quiet, the subtle ones are hard to detect and you may assume you’re free. So you deliberately test yourself by examining objects/situations that used to provoke attachment, to avoid arrogance and flush out subtle remnants.

6. Final application

Still alternating śamatha with mundane vipaśyanā, this removes the smallest, most subtle desire-realm afflictions and becomes the immediate cause of freedom from the desire realm and actual first absorption.

The core lesson: no matter how sharp the discernment, without focusing that conclusion with śamatha you won’t suppress the afflictions; and no matter how much śamatha you cultivate, without discernment you won’t subdue them.

3) What mundane success really is: “asleep, not dead”

The chapter is realistic: when subdued this way, desire-realm afflictions are like being in a deep sleep—generally not manifest, but still latent. This can protect you in this life and support higher rebirth, but it is **not liberation**.

This is where the chapter begins to turn your motivation toward the supramundane: mundane progress can actually reinforce attachment to refined saṃsāric states, so ultimate release requires uncommon vipaśyanā (emptiness-realisation).

Who chooses the mundane path, and why this matters

Tsongkhapa (via Asaṅga) explains why some proceed only mundanely: non-Buddhists who hold a permanent self and have no interest in selflessness; Buddhists with dull faculties (difficulty with emptiness); sharp people whose virtue hasn’t matured enough

for direct realisation in this life; and bodhisattvas aiming for enlightenment later, prioritising merit now.

The point isn't to judge—it's diagnostic: **your next step depends on your aims and capacities**, but either way, śamatha remains the foundation.

The chapter's “great warning”: don't mistake concentration for wisdom

This section is one of Tsongkhapa's most practical admonitions. It targets two errors:

1. **Hunting for “special secret instructions”** while ignoring the classic texts, then blaming the texts for one's lack of results. Tsongkhapa says: the teachings in the scriptures *are* the special instructions; trade the jewel for costume jewellery and you get confusion.
2. **Confusing Buddhist and non-Buddhist concentration** (and confusing mundane non-discursive calm with direct emptiness-wisdom). He warns that without study you won't even distinguish Buddhist from non-Buddhist concentration, let alone Mahāyāna from Hīnayāna or Vajrayāna from Pāramitāyāna.

Practice implication (strong): if you don't know what you're doing, it can be better to pause than to engrain wrong habits. Tsongkhapa's tone here is protective: don't build a lifetime of confidently misdirected practice.

Śamatha–vipaśyanā interplay for your path

This chapter is basically the “hand-off note” from Volume 4 to Volume 5:

- śamatha is the **stability and pliancy** that makes the mind serviceable;
- the supramundane path is vipaśyanā aimed at **liberation**, which (for Buddhists) means insight into **selflessness/emptiness**;
- mundane “calm/coarse” analysis can suppress afflictions but cannot uproot.

For your own emphasis (emptiness of self): excitement and attachment are always tethered to a felt “I” that wants. Mundane comparisons may loosen gross desire, but only insight that deconstructs the “I” can uproot the engine.

Meditation tips threaded through Chapter 6

A. A “post-śamatha” session template (very simple)

1. **Stabilise** (non-analytical) until the mind is bright and steady.
2. **Analyse briefly** (2–5 minutes): a calm/coarse comparison if training mundane, or a liberation-oriented topic if training supramundane.
3. **Return to stabilisation** holding the conclusion.

This mirrors the chapter's point that the first two attentions explicitly alternate analysis and then making the conclusion the śamatha object.

B. “Analysis as testing” (the 5th attention)

Use it as a diagnostic: if you feel unusually free, test gently with a formerly sticky trigger. If attachment still appears, no discouragement—this is **precisely** what the “analysis” attention is for, to prevent arrogance and reveal what remains.

C. Guard-rail against false progress

If your practice becomes “non-discursive and calm,” do not automatically label it emptiness or tantra attainment. Tsongkhapa’s poem is basically a safety manual against this.

Diagnostics and pitfalls

Diagnostics

- If analysis shatters concentration, keep strengthening śamatha until analysis can move without disturbing it (fish in water).
- If you feel “done” because gross afflictions are quiet, apply the “analysis/testing” method; subtle afflictions can hide behind pleasant calm.

Pitfalls

- Treating śamatha as liberation (it’s not).
- Thinking śamatha alone suppresses afflictions (it needs mundane discernment; and liberation needs uncommon vipaśyanā).
- “Secret instruction hunting” and under-valuing the classic maps (jewel vs costume jewellery).

Pocket reminder

Śamatha is the instrument; vipaśyanā is the liberating work.

Mundane analysis can put afflictions to sleep; uncommon insight into selflessness uproots them. And the way to avoid confusion is to rely on the classic instructions rather than chasing novelty.