Steps Vol 4 — Master Map (śamatha engineered to interlock with vipaśyanā)

- volume diagnostics + pitfalls + pocket reminders (global layer)
  - global diagnostics (quick checks)
    - **if it feels calm but progress stalls:** suspect subtle laxity (clarity down, grip slack)
    - **if you can't say what happened:** introspection is weak; strengthen mindfulness first
    - **if analysis shatters calm:** shorten analysis; strengthen stabilisation first
  - global pitfalls
    - mistaking calm/blank/pleasant for attainment
    - chasing nyam (bliss, lights, specialness)
    - over-application (tightening a tightened string)
    - **irregularity:** long gaps reset momentum
  - global pocket reminder
    - stability serves seeing; seeing purifies stability
    - hold → check → apply; then stop fixing when balanced
    - short analysis, clear conclusion, then soak in steadiness
- volume cushion card — the whole method in one loop
  - **frame (30–60 sec):** refuge + bodhicitta; 'stability serves seeing'
  - **place:** establish the object (simple, stable, repeatable)
  - **run the feedback loop:** hold → check → name → apply → return → release
  - **insert one analytic pulse (short):** dependent arising / self-search (then stop)
  - **soak:** rest again on the object; let the insight flavour permeate
  - **close:** dedication; stand slowly; carry one-breath resets into the day
- volume training card — the operating system (maps used throughout)
  - definition
    - thesis (the hinge of the volume)
      - without a stable, clear, serviceable mind (śamatha), analysis cannot cut deeply
      - without analysis (vipaśyanā), stability becomes a cul-de-sac of serenity
      - so: craft stability → yoke to inquiry → unify both in one session
    - repair kit: five faults + antidotes
      - **fault 1:** laziness → faith, aspiration, effort, pliancy
      - **fault 2:** forgetting the instructions/ object → mindfulness
      - **fault 3:** laxity and excitement → introspection + appropriate application
      - **fault 4:** not applying antidotes → intention/application (the switch)
      - **fault 5:** over-applying → equanimity (stop fixing)
    - roadmap: nine stages (trend-line, not a straight ladder)
      - 1) placement
      - 2) continuous placement
      - 3) re-placement (patched)
      - 4) close placement
      - 5) taming
      - 6) pacification
      - 7) complete pacification
      - 8) one-pointed attention
      - 9) balanced placement (**still not yet śamatha: pliancy is dividing line**)
    - propulsion system: six forces + four attentions
      - **six forces:** hearing → reflection → mindfulness → introspection → perseverance → familiarity
      - **four attentions:** tight → intermittent → uninterrupted → spontaneous
    - non-negotiable guard-rails
      - calm/blank/pleasant ≠ śamatha ≠ emptiness
      - subtle laxity is the quiet saboteur; keep brightness non-negotiable
      - train first; review after (no mid-sit audit)
  - check
    - **five faults + antidotes** repair kit
    - **nine stages** progress map
    - **pliancy** dividing line (stage 9 ≠ śamatha)
    - **laxity and excitement** the two main meditation faults
    - **equanimity** stop fixing when balanced
    - **Core Concepts (reference hub)**
    - **chapter 6 śamatha as part of the path** (what next?)
      - maps to
        - same faculty
          - warnings (safety rails)
            - don't confuse concentration with wisdom
            - avoid 'secret instruction hunting'; rely on classic maps
        - same faculty
          - as force
            - part 2 mundane path detail (calmness and coarseness)
              - **six attentions (+ result):** analytical meditative states leading to first absorption
              - **1)** discernment of characteristics
              - **2)** arising of belief (analysis becomes conviction)
              - **3)** isolation (gross afflictions)
              - **4)** delight/withdrawal (intermediate)
              - **5)** analysis as testing (avoid false confidence; flush subtle remnants)
              - **6)** final application (subtle remnants)
              - **mundane success:** afflictions 'asleep, not dead' (not liberation)
          - as force
            - part 1 fork after śamatha (two paths, and no others)
              - **mundane path:** suppress afflictions (temporary; latent seeds remain)
              - **supramundane path:** uproot afflictions (liberating insight)
              - **key clarification:** not simply 'śamatha suppresses, vipaśyanā uproots' you need both stabilisation and discernment
              - **readiness marker:** analysis can 'swim' without disturbing calm (fish in water)
        - definition
          - **mindfulness** hold the object (antidote to forgetting)
          - **introspection** quality control (detect laxity/excitement)
          - **intention/application** "correct now" (apply antidotes)
      - definition
        - part 1 training machinery
          - nine stages (what changes)
          - six forces (what powers progress)
          - four attentions (texture of practice)
          - **stage-based emphasis:** 1–2 return; 3–4 mindfulness; 5–6 introspection; 7–8 perseverance; 9 familiarity
        - part 2 assessment machinery
          - **dividing line:** stage 9 is not yet śamatha (needs mental + physical pliancy)
          - **pliancy sequence:** mental first → physical; bliss stabilises only later
          - five marks (arrival checks)
          - **false positives:** calm/blank/pleasant ≠ śamatha; non-discursive ≠ emptiness
      - warning
        - guard-rail from the root text
          - stage 9 can be mistaken for high insight/tantra; don't be confused — pliancy is key
          - cue
            - maps to
              - what pliancy is (functional test, not a mood)
                - **mental pliancy:** attention compliant, eager, feather-touch adjustments
                - **physical pliancy:** body light, posture easy
                - **not pliancy:** syrupy stillness / hazy heaviness (subtle laxity)
              - three common experiences (benefits and risks)
                - **bliss/rapture:** helpful energy; risk of attachment/chasing
                - **clarity/brightness:** vivid object; risk of covert tension
                - **non-conceptual quiet:** helpful; risk of mistaking blankness for equipoise
              - use pliancy for insight (emptiness of self first)
                - **three-phase loop:** settle → look (owner/designation check) → scan
                - **ratio guideline:** 70–80% placement, 20–30% analysis (micro-windows)
              - advanced diagnostics (quick self-tests)
                - **bliss vs subtle laxity:** can you sharpen edges on demand?
                - **clarity vs tension:** scan forehead/eyes/jaw; soften if tight
                - **quiet vs blankness:** is the object still distinct?
              - **pocket reminder:** ease → see → soak
    - **chapter 5 attaining śamatha** (training machinery + assessment machinery)
      - **chapter 4 alternative** pliancy and 'near-śamatha' experiences (how to relate to them)
      - **chapter 4 laxity and excitement** (repair loop mastery)
        - cushion card — hold → check → name → apply → return → release
          - **hold:** mindfulness (keep object present)
          - **check:** introspection (quality-control 'spy')
          - **name:** laxity or excitement (no analysis)
          - **apply:** intention/application (correct immediately)
          - **return:** tempered strength
          - **release:** equanimity (stop fixing when balanced)
        - training card session protocol
          - five faults and their antidotes (operating system)
          - **pre-session drill:** name object; name dangers; preload corrections
          - six-step antidote loop (in-session order)
        - skills training how to build abilities
          - **cue phrase:** mindfulness at the gate → introspection appears
          - **micro-check cadence:** 'again and again' without leaving the object
          - **subtle laxity warning:** calm can hide dullness; insist on brightness + stability
    - **chapter 1 śamatha and vipaśyanā** (orientation and order)
      - core
        - **core thesis:** all mundane and supramundane qualities arise from both together
        - **why śamatha must come first (for direct realisation):** stability makes analysis bite
        - **what vipaśyanā is:** analytic wisdom culminating in direct emptiness realisation
        - **why union matters:** stability without wisdom stalls; wisdom without stability scatters
        - **guard-rails:** don't mistake conceptual understanding for vipaśyanā
        - **doctrinal frame:** realms and afflictions (context for why uprooting requires wisdom)
        - **pocket reminder:** stabilise the mind; sharpen the wisdom; join them inseparably
      - introduction — stability serves seeing; seeing purifies stability
        - **purpose:** make attention fit-for-purpose (a serviceable instrument)
        - **conditions:** inner (ethics, joy, faith, bodhicitta) + outer (place, schedule, simplicity)
        - **progress markers:** less time lost, faster recovery, increasing pliancy
        - **session architecture:** stabilise → brief analysis → stabilise again → dedicate
    - **chapter 2 preparing for śamatha** (installing the self-correcting attention system)
      - six preconditions (engineering constraints, not moralism)
        - 1) suitable place (low stimulation, predictability)
        - 2) little desire
        - 3) contentment
        - 4) reduce activities (roles multiply distraction)
        - 5) pure ethical discipline (remorse → proliferation)
        - 6) reduce thoughts of desire/fame/ gain (weaken identity-project)
      - object selection for this context
        - **claim:** for śamatha as defined here, only certain objects/methods are reliably causal
        - **special object emphasis:** body of the Buddha as stable, bounded, controllable object
      - buddha-image method (training sequence)
        - look at an image → reproduce mentally → experience it as in front
        - begin with one characteristic (e.g., gold colour)
        - **if it changes:** stop, reset, begin again (don't train drift)
        - only add details after mastery of one feature
    - **chapter 3 focusing the mind** (flawless method + session sizing)
      - **goal definition:** stability + clarity (neither alone is enough)
      - **flawless method:** mindfulness holds; introspection monitors (simultaneously)
      - **object fidelity rule:** hold exactly as intended; if it corrupts, stop/reset
      - **two obstacles:** laxity (clarity loss) and excitement (stability loss)
      - **balance principle:** neither too tight nor too loose (tuning a string)
      - **session length:** many short sessions early; end while still going well
    - **getting started** śākyamuni imagery-light (on-ramp to stage 1)
      - **key principle:** start with recognition, not a photograph
      - look → close → refresh drill (10 minutes)
        - look 10–15 sec → close 2–5 sec → refresh 5–8 sec (repeat 25–35 times)
        - fast resets: don't chase or repair when it fades/changes
      - seed features (pick one and keep it)
        - gold face oval (no details)
        - urna as a small bright point
        - halo ring (soft circle of light)
        - hands in meditation mudrā (simple bowl-shape at lap)
      - aphantasia-friendly options (if imagery is very weak)
        - spatial sense + felt sense + meaning-based recognition
      - **progression rule:** many clean reps; increase one variable only