

Shamatha: Hindrances, Faults, and Supports

Compiled 2026 by George Draffan

Sources include *The Stages of Meditation* by Kamalashila, *Shamatha Meditation* by Gen Lamrimpa, *Tranquillity and Insight* by Thrangu Rinpoche, and *Wake Up To Your Life* by Ken McLeod

Five Hindrances	Remedies
Busyness Mental or physical restless and agitation, endless thinking, anxiety, worry, remorse	• Recognize busyness, relax and return attention to the practice. • Maintain light, open attention. • Relax by sighing, and then place slightly more attention on exhaling than inhaling. • Rest attention on the aspect of your breathing or the part of your body that feels most settled. • Rest attention on the lower body, such as the abdomen rising and falling as you breathe. • Look downward, or close your eyes. Relax the face and eyes. • Set aside worries, fault-finding, and the tyranny of clinging to thoughts and emotions. • Renew your interest in meditation practice by appreciating the happiness and comfort it brings. • Reflect on impermanence and suffering and why you are practicing. • Cut busyness forcibly with one breath. • Imagine an inverted black lotus flower in your torso, going down into the ground. • Count the breath until busyness subsides. • Go to a dark warm place.
Dullness Sloth, torpor, laziness, lack of vitality, foggiess, going blank, sleepiness	• Recognize dullness; energize and bring more attention to the practice. • Diligently direct attention to the breath; place more attention on inhaling. • Bring attention to the air passing in and out of your nostrils. • Feel the detailed sensations of the body. • Open your eyes, look up slightly. • Imagine a bright white light in your head. • Imagine a white lotus flower in your torso, growing up in the sky. • Cultivate faith by reflecting on the value of awareness and the three jewels; aspire to awaken. • Imagine your body sitting in a vast space; mix awareness and breath with space. • Tense your body for a few moments and then relax. • Renew your body's natural alignment and alertness. • Stand up, walk, or go to a light open place.

Five Hindrances	Remedies
Desire Longing, wishing, or craving or grasping sense-objects or mind states	• Recognize attraction, desire, attachment, and grasping. • Place attention on the feeling of desire itself, rather than on the object of desire. • Place one-pointed attention on the object of meditation. • Feel sensations and whole body awareness. • Reflect on impermanence and suffering and why you are practicing. • Reflect on the superiority of happiness that is not dependent on sense-objects.
Aversion Dislike, hatred, ill-will, disgust, judgment, boredom, fear	• Recognize aversion arising. • Place attention on the aversion itself, rather than on the apparent object of aversion. • Sustain attention on the object of meditation. • Feel sensations and whole body awareness. • Reflect on impermanence and suffering, and why you are practicing. • Cultivate lovingkindness toward yourself and others. • Take delight in practice.
Doubt Skepticism, paralysis by analysis, indecision, inadequacy, resistance to practice	• Recognize doubt. • Recognize that feelings, thoughts, and stories are feelings and thoughts, not facts. • Sustain attention on the object of meditation with continuity, firmness, and steadiness. • Allow your positive experiences of meditation give you confidence to continue practicing. • Develop faith by reflecting on the reliability of the teacher, the teachings, and the sangha. • Allow your teacher and sangha help you overcome self-doubt.

Five Faults	Remedies
Unwillingness Laziness arising as indolence, busyness, or discouragement	• Cultivate enthusiasm, faith, aspiration, and pliancy. • Renew motivation to practice by reflecting deeply on your sufferings and your aspirations. • Cultivate confidence in your ability to awaken. • Hone your competence in skills so that you are well-trained and ready. • Stand at your cushion until you know why you aren't willing to practice.
Forgetting - to practice - how to practice - the object of attention	• Cultivate mindfulness: remembering. • Review and clarify the practice instructions. • Practice daily; schedule the time and don't negotiate. • Sharp, clear, one-pointed mindfulness makes meditation pleasant.
Busyness and dullness	• Recognize when dullness or busyness is occurring. • When busyness arises, relax and return attention to the object. • When dullness arises, energize and return to the object of attention.
Not making an effort Nonapplication	• Identify dullness and busyness when they occur and apply remedies diligently. • Restore balance by energizing (when dull) and relaxing (when busy). • Increase vigilance and mindfulness. • Reflect on the shortcomings of the life of habitual patterns. • Reflect on difficulty of obtaining good conditions for practice. • Reflect on death and impermanence.
Trying too hard Overapplication	• Don't apply remedies when the faults aren't arising; simply rest in attention. • Cultivate equanimity by relaxing and doing one simple task (eg attend to breathing).

Six Supports	Descriptions and Investigations
Conducive space	• Prioritize space as well as time. • Arrange a clean space with natural or indirect lighting, with few interruptions or noise. ◦ <i>Where do I sit physically?</i> ◦ <i>Where do I sit emotionally?</i>
Basic needs met	• Not having to worry about economic survival. • Observing diet and sleep that support health and alertness. ◦ <i>What do I need physically?</i> ◦ <i>What do I need emotionally?</i> ◦ <i>What do I need to maintain my sense of identity?</i>
Contentment	• Cultivating both outer contentment (basic needs met) and inner contentment. • Not being excessively attached to clothing, wealth, mundane activities, etc. ◦ <i>How much is enough physically?</i> ◦ <i>How much is enough emotionally?</i>
Manageable life	• Space to breathe. Balance. Not hurrying or compressing. • Organize your life around spiritual practice, not vice versa. ◦ <i>What gets in the way of my practice?</i>
Ethical behavior	• Rely on experience rather than commandments; cultivate sensitivity to the results of my acts. ◦ <i>What keeps me unbalanced?</i> ◦ <i>What feelings drive actions of mine that cause suffering for self or others?</i>
Letting go of drama	• Earth drama: rigidity and stubbornness. Water drama: clinging and withdrawing. Fire drama: consuming, seducing, and anger. Air drama: rationalizing and busyness. Void drama: falling to pieces, or going blank. ◦ <i>What stories am I telling?</i> ◦ <i>What emotions am I clinging to or fascinated by?</i>