Getting Started with Śamatha (Śākyamuni, imagery-light)

- part 1 — the right attitude (why this works)
  - start with recognition, not a picture
    - first job: recognise the object again and again
    - phrase: “i’m holding the idea/sign of the Buddha, not a photograph.”
  - baseline holds < 5 sec are normal
    - many clean repetitions beat forcing longer holds
    - goal: “30 reps where i clearly know the object each time.”
- part 2 — choose a seed feature (pick one and stay with it)
  - recommended order (for weak imagery)
    - 1) golden face oval (no details)
    - 2) urna as a small bright point (between brows)
    - 3) raised right hand shape (palm facing you)
  - keep it single and simple
    - avoid holding the whole Buddha at first; it overloads the mind
    - expand detail only after the seed is stable
- cushion card — 10-minute micro-rep session (read once, then practice)
  - set up (30 sec)
    - sit comfortably; let body settle; eyes open
    - place Śākyamuni image at eye level
    - quietly decide: “my object is the seed feature; my job is to hold it and notice when it’s gone.”
  - cycle (repeat 25–35 times)
    - 1) look (10–15 sec): soft gaze on the seed feature; don’t stare
    - 2) close (2–5 sec): hold only the seed feature; optionally use a thin label: “Buddha… Buddha…”
    - 3) refresh (5–8 sec): open eyes; re-imprint gently
  - when it fades or changes
    - don’t chase; don’t repair
    - open eyes immediately and refresh; fast resets are the training
  - finish (last minute)
    - eyes closed: try one slightly longer hold (same seed)
    - dedicate: “may this stability become a cause for wisdom and compassion.”
  - today’s aim: 25 clean reps (not longer holds)
- part 3 — how to build the sign (fastest training method)
  - use a real support at eye level
    - look → close → refresh is the core drill
    - refresh often; do not struggle with fading
  - afterimage trick (optional but powerful)
    - look 15–20 sec; close eyes; ride the afterimage for 2–5 sec; refresh
    - this trains sensory imprint → mental sign
  - two tweaks that often double hold time
    - make the seed bigger (e.g., face the size of a plate)
    - place it closer (about 1 metre in front)
  - thin verbal tether (optional)
    - very light label: “Buddha… Buddha…” to stabilise recognition
    - not chanting; just a tag to prevent losing the task
- part 4 — when imagery is very weak (aphantasia-friendly options)
  - non-visual anchors (still valid training)
    - 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
    - keep the same micro-rep cycle; clarity may be ‘lucid knowing’ more than sharp imagery
- part 5 — progression (how to ‘level up’ safely)
  - stay with one seed feature until
    - ~20 clean reps where you genuinely recognise it each time
  - increase one variable only
    - hold time: 5 sec → 6–8 sec (small steps)
    - or reduce refresh time slightly
    - or add one detail (face oval + urna point)
  - never increase two variables at once