

Chants & Recitations



Giac Tam Meditation Center

3729 Pilot Knob Road,
Eagan, MN 55122
giactamcommunity@gmail.com
www.zen-gtmc.org

Welcome to Giac Tam Meditation Center (GTMC)!

Also referred to as Giac Tam Monastery, GTMC was established in 2014 to offer a serene environment dedicated to the study and practice of Buddhism. The center provides opportunities for sitting meditation, exploration of Buddhist texts and teachings, and application of practice in daily living. All individuals are invited to participate.

Our Tradition

We uphold the tradition established by Zen master Thich Thanh Tu, who revitalized the 13th-century Vietnamese Truc Lam (Bamboo Forest) Zen School of Buddhism. This tradition is grounded in the principles and practices of the early Zen patriarchs, with primary emphasis on the original teachings of the Buddha, who began sharing his insights over 2,500 years ago following his enlightenment. The Buddha's teachings provide a framework for understanding the origins of human suffering and outline a path for overcoming it through the realization of one's true nature. Our commitment is to follow this path, aspiring towards a meaningful life characterized by joy, purpose, and service.

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INCENSE OFFERING

(The group kneels/stands in lines facing the altar, palms together at heart level. Only the chant leader starts reciting the invocation while holding burning incense in his/her hands at the level of forehead).

*The fragrant incense of Precepts, Samadhi, and Wisdom,
The fragrant incense of Awakening and Liberation,
Luminous clouds of incense pervades the entire Dharma Realm,
Offering to the Three Jewels in all ten directions. (Bell – Half-bow)*

Namo Bodhisattva of incense offering. (3 times)

(Then one bell, everyone stands up and makes a half-bow. Chant leader places the incense into an incense holder).

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BUDDHA PRAISE

(The group remains standing with palms together at chest level. Upon hearing 3 bells, the chant leader starts reciting the first few words, then everyone joins in.)

*The Buddha of Great Loving-Kindness and Compassion loves all sentient beings,
The Buddha of Great Joy and Equanimity saves all sentient beings,
Before the beauty of Buddha's radiant presence,
We prostrate ourselves with utmost sincerity. (Bell – Half-bow)*

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REVERENCE FOR THE THREE JEWELS

(The group remains standing with palms together at heart level. The chant leader starts reciting the first few words, then everyone joins in.)

With one mind, we bow to all Buddhas of the three periods of time in the boundless spaces of the Dharma Realm. (Bell – Full bow)

With one mind, we bow to the True Dharma of the three periods of time in the boundless spaces of the Dharma Realm. (Bell – Full bow)

With one mind, we bow to all Sages and Saints of the three periods of time in the boundless spaces of the Dharma Realm. (Bell, Bell – Full bow)

DHARMA PRAISE

(The group remains standing with palms together at heart level. The two celebrants invite the bell alternating with the wooden fish. The chant leader starts reciting the first few words, then everyone joins in.)

The Buddha-Dharma is incomparably profound and marvelous. It is difficult for us to encounter in eons and kalpas. Now that we hear and perceive the true Dharma, we vow to uphold and live by it. We vow to understand the true meaning of Tathagata's words.

Homage to all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who were present at Shakyamuni Buddha's Prajna teaching assembly. (Bell – Half-bow)

THE PRAJNA PARAMITA HEART SUTRA

Chant leader only: *"Heart of Great Perfect Wisdom Sutra..."*

All: *Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, when deeply practicing Prajna paramita, clearly saw that all five aggregates are empty and thus relieved all suffering. (Bell)*

Shariputra, form does not differ from emptiness, emptiness does not differ from form. Form itself is emptiness, emptiness itself form. Sensations, perceptions, formations, and consciousness are also like this. (Bell)

Shariputra, all dharmas are marked by emptiness; they neither arise nor cease, are neither defiled nor pure, neither increase nor decrease. Therefore, given emptiness, there is no form, no sensation, no perception, no formation, no consciousness; no eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind; no sight, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no object of mind; no realm of sight ... no realm of mind consciousness. (Bell)

There is neither ignorance nor extinction of ignorance ... neither old age and death, nor extinction of old age and death; no suffering, no cause, no cessation, no path; no knowledge and no attainment. (Bell)

With nothing to attain, a bodhisattva relies on Prajna paramita, and thus the mind is without hindrance. Without hindrance, there is no fear. Far beyond all inverted views, one realizes Nirvana. (Bell)

All buddhas of past, present, and future rely on Prajna paramita and thereby attain unsurpassed, complete, perfect enlightenment. Therefore, know the Prajna paramita as the great miraculous mantra, the great bright mantra, the supreme mantra, the incomparable mantra, which removes all suffering and is true, not false. Therefore, we proclaim the Prajna paramita mantra, the mantra that says:

“Gate, Gate, Paragate, Parasamgate, Bodhi Svaha!” (Bell, Bell – Half-bow)

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REVERENCE FOR BUDDHAS AND BODHISATTVAS

(The group remains standing with palms together at heart level. The chant leader starts reciting the first few words of each line, then everyone joins in.)

With deep respect, we bow to Vipassi Buddha of the past. (Bell – Full bow)

With deep respect, we bow to Shakyamuni Buddha of the present. (Bell – Full bow)

With deep respect, we bow to Maitreya Buddha of the future. (Bell – Full bow)

With deep respect, we bow to Great Wisdom Manjusri Bodhisattva. (Bell – Full bow)

With deep respect, we bow to Great Virtue Samantabhadra Bodhisattva. (Bell – Full bow)

With deep respect, we bow to Great Compassion Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva. (Bell – Full bow)

With deep respect, we bow to all Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Zen masters and teachers of the past, present, and future. (Bell, Bell – Full bow)

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REPENTANCE CHANT

(The group kneels down with palms together at heart level. The chant leader starts reciting the first phrase, then everyone joins in.)

Gathering before the Buddha’s radiant shrine,

With utmost sincerity and reverence,

We honor Buddhas in ten directions.

Calling Bodhisattvas, Saints and Sages of three times,

Bear witness now, as our hearts renew:

Countless wrongs and errors mark our endless past,

Wrought by deed, by word, by mind’s dark cast.

Adrift aimlessly within the Three Realms,

*Unceasingly committing innumerable seeds of disgrace.
Awakened now, we bow in deep repentance. (Bell)
With shame and sorrow for what's gone before,
We call Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Saints, and Sages evermore,
Witness our confession, offer us your grace,
That all our karma, like morning dew, erase,
Vanished by the rising sun's embrace.
In this fleeting life, we're blessed to hear the Buddha's call.
Yet shadows linger—karma's burden weighs us all.
Still, we cradle greed, anger and ignorance,
Harboring selfishness, jealousy, and pride.
We whisper lies, speak venom, double-tongued and sly.
Harming and destroying lives for the benefits of oneself.
Committing countless misdeeds, have we ever shied...
Calling on the Three Jewels to witness our repentance here. (Bell)
Vowing to quiet the wandering thoughts that never cease,
No longer commit sins, not even in the least.
Keeping our body, speech and mind as pure as snow.
Seeking the teachings' truth, to let the meaning show.
Realizing our True Nature, single-minded, focused and aware.
Then see our thoughts and outer forms as fleeting, mere despair.
Recognizing that karma's consciousness is empty, while Wisdom sustains.
Mastering life and death, free from obscurations.
Choosing to return to the Three Realms to save sentient beings.
With boundless heart, Compassion flows without end,
Carrying all to the shore of Liberation, our hands to lend.
May the merits of our practice benefit all sentient beings.
May every living-being finds Nirvana's peace,
Enter the Buddha's House and sit upon the Throne,
Draped in Buddha's Robe, the Dharmakaya worn.
May our Bodhicitta's vow be ever born.
Realizing birthless truth in Pure Dharma's Realm,
Attaining Buddhahood with wonderous Enlightenment,
Living with true Suchness in perfect radiant Light.
(Bell – Half-bow)*

*The following Gatha can be substituted for the long Repentance verse above.

Chant leader recites: *Acknowledgment of Karma*

The group recites:

*“All my ancient, twisted karma,
From beginningless greed, hate and delusion,
Born of body, speech and mind,
I now fully avow.”*

(Bell – Half-bow) → Repeat three times.

Chant Leader recites:

*The nature of sinfulness is empty; It's created by the illusory mind.
Once the illusory mind is eliminated, sins are purified.
Both the purified sins and cleansed mind are fundamentally empty.
That is the essence of true repentance.*

Namo Bodhisattva of Repentance. (x3)

(Bell – Half-bow. Everyone stands up.)

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RECITING THE FIVE PRECEPTS

(The group remains standing with palms together at heart level. The chant leader starts reciting the first heading phrase, then everyone joins in.)

The First Precept: Reverence for Life

I vow throughout my life to abstain from taking the lives of living beings. This commitment encompasses a determination not to kill, not to encourage others to kill, and not to feel joy upon witnessing or hearing about acts of killing. Instead, I will nurture compassion and actively protect the lives of humans and all other species.

(Bell – Half-bow)

The Second Precept: Respect for Others' Property

I vow throughout my life to refrain from taking anything that is not freely offered. I am resolved not to steal or forcibly acquire the property of others due to personal desire. Instead, I will honor and safeguard the belongings of others just as I do my own. (Bell – Half-bow)

The Third Precept: Responsible Sexual Conduct

I vow throughout my life to avoid sexual misconduct. This means I will not engage in extramarital affairs or form additional intimate relationships. I vow to remain faithful to my partner, recognizing that sexual misconduct can ruin my own life and negatively impact others. By practicing and advocating the value of commitment and marital fidelity, I will protect my family and help others safeguard theirs.

(Bell – Half-bow)

The Fourth Precept: Truthful and Kind Speech

I vow throughout my life to abstain from false speech. This includes a commitment not to utter untruths or deceive others for selfish reasons. I will not allow anger to prompt harsh words that cause harm, and I will avoid spreading uncertain news, criticizing, condemning, or falsely accusing others. I recognize that such actions can bring suffering and hardship to others, and I commit to refraining from them.

(Bell – Half-bow)

The Fifth Precept: Mindful Consumption

I vow throughout my life to refrain from consuming alcohol and drugs. I resolve not to ingest any substance that may intoxicate my mind, harm my body, or cause distress to my family and others. I will not consume any other intoxicants and will choose only those things that foster peace and the wellbeing for my body and mind.

(Bell – Half-bow)

Dedication

May the Three Jewels guide and support us in our observance of the Five Precepts, enabling us to become exemplary citizens in this life and in those to come.

(Bell – Half-bow)

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THE TWELVE VOWS:

Chant leader recites: *We sincerely make the following vows.*

The group recites:

- 1. First, to keep our mind tranquil and pure.*
- 2. Second, to end the incessant activity of the Alaya Consciousness.*

3. *Third, to eradicate all doubts.*
4. *Fourth, to maintain the fullness of the Samadhi Moon.*
5. *Fifth, to prevent our mental objects from either arising or ceasing.*
6. *Sixth, to break free from the net of our attachments.*
7. *Seventh, to continuously contemplate and practice the Ten Bodhisattva Stages.*
8. *Eighth, to deeply understand the Buddha Dharma in all Realms.*
9. *Ninth, to calm our monkey mind.*
10. *Tenth, to still our galloping thoughts.*
11. *Eleventh, to listen to Buddha's teachings with an open heart.*
12. *Twelfth, to delight in learning and practicing the teachings of all Zen Masters.*

(Bell – half-bow)

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CONCLUDING PRAYER

(Chant leader recites alone. The group remains standing with palms together at chest level).

May the Zen monastery always be serenely pure.
May all Buddhist practitioners always be harmonious.
May the Buddha's wisdom gloriously radiate throughout space.
May the rain of Dharma permeate all beings.
May all Buddhists have deep faith,
And the field of merits continuously increase.
May all beings live in peace and joy.
May all wars cease everywhere,
And may all of us become Buddhas. (Bell – Half-bow).

The group recites: *Namo Sakyamuni Buddha.* (Bell – Half-bow).

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*NOTE: If practicing at home, one can substitute the above **CONCLUDING PRAYER** with:

Dedication of Merits:

*May our merits and virtues,
Benefit all sentient beings,
May we and other living beings,
Soon realize the truth and become enlightened.*
(One bell - Half bow)

TAKING REFUGE IN THE THREE JEWELS

Chant leader recites:

*With deep respect and wholehearted sincerity, we bow and take refuge in the Three
Unsurpassed Jewels.* (Bell – Half-bow)

The group recites:

*To the Buddha I return and rely,
Vowing that all living beings
Understand the great Way profoundly,
And bring forth the Bodhi mind.*
(Bell - Full bow).

*To the Dharma I return and rely,
Vowing that all living beings
Deeply penetrate the Sutra Treasury,
And have wisdom like the sea.*
(Bell - Full bow).

*To the Sangha I return and rely,
Vowing that all living beings
Form together a great assembly,
One and all in harmony.*
(Bell - Full bow).

(The group turns and faces one another in 2 lines and makes a half-bow to each other. The group then turns toward the Altar and makes another half-bow to the Altar).

SUPPLEMENT CHANTS

VERSES OF VOWS

*We gather here sincerely as your disciples.
Praying that our country remains peaceful
That wars and disasters all come to cease.
People live in harmony like siblings of one family.
May everyone show compassion and support each other,
erasing hostility and resentment toward one another.*

*May peace and safety blanket the world in gentle light,
With hearts that cherish love and hold each other tight.
Sharing gifts of food and warmth in sincere embrace,
Unite as one family, one kin beneath a common grace.*

*May every being, from the tiniest insect to those who roam,
Extend gentle compassion, sheltering each other as their own.
Let no one bring harm for selfish gain or pride,
But dwell in true harmony, together, side by side.*

*May the True Dharma Rain descend upon all beings,
Bestowing blessings and purification wide and deep.
May our burdens dissolve, mind and heart refreshed.
May its sacred waters guide us on paths profound,
toward the noble harvest of the Three Vehicles found.*

*We vow to transform all mental afflictions bound
With diligence, our practice will never stray or fade.
Our resolve stands firm—unyielding, diamond-strong,
Unshaken by the winds or waves, we remain steadfast.*

*We advance ever onward, beyond birth and death.
No demon or obstacle can block our path
The sword of wisdom is ever ready in hand.
With it alone, Supreme Enlightenment is attained.*

*The three poisons and eight winds cannot obstruct our path
Just with the Thusness Samadhi seal, we proceed.
Entering the Dharmakaya House indeed
And stroll freely atop the Sumeru's peak.*

*Observing suffering beings in the ten directions,
Moved by compassion, we respond as needed.
Guiding all toward the shore of Liberation
Never discouraged, despite all hardships.*

*With gratitude, we offer the fruits of our practice,
Merits and virtues to benefit all sentient beings.
May we together realize the Supreme Dharma
Become awakened and achieve the Buddha Way.*

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Prayer for Inner Peace and World Peace

Homage to all awakened ones and noble teachers throughout time.

With hearts united, we earnestly pray that:

May each one of us find tranquility and peace within our hearts, letting go of turmoil and resting in the gentle clarity of our Original Mind. May we cultivate compassion, patience, and wisdom in ourselves, dissolving the seeds of fear and discord so that inner harmony blossoms. As we nurture peace in our own lives, may that serenity ripple outward, touching family, friends, communities, and nations. May our shared dedication to understanding and kindness create a foundation for lasting world peace. May barriers of division dissolve, and may love, justice, and kindness radiate to every corner of the globe. Together, may we nurture a world where all beings are safe, respected, and free to flourish, bringing lasting happiness to humanity and all sentient life.

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Significance of Shantideva's Dedication Prayer

Shantideva's dedication prayer serves as a profound reminder that the essence of our practice extends far beyond personal benefit. This prayer emphasizes that our commitment and dedication are meant to encompass all living beings, without exception. It is within this spirit of universal compassion that the heart of the Bodhisattva truly manifests.

Practitioners who aspire to follow the Bodhisattva's Path are encouraged to include this dedication prayer in their routine. Chanting it at the conclusion of all meditation and chanting practices helps reaffirm one's vow to cultivate compassion and benefit others.

This particular prayer is drawn from Chapter 10 of the Bodhicharyavatara, the renowned text composed by Shantideva. Its inclusion in daily practice provides both inspiration and guidance on the path of altruistic intention.

*May all beings everywhere,
plagued by sufferings of body and mind,
obtain an ocean of happiness and joy
by virtue of my merits.*

*May no living creature suffer,
commit evil or ever fall ill.
May no one be afraid or belittled,
with a mind weighed down by
depression.*

*May the blind see forms,
and the deaf hear sounds.
May those whose bodies are worn with
toil,
be restored on finding repose.*

*May the naked find clothing;
the hungry find food.
May the thirsty find water
and delicious drinks.*

*May the poor find wealth;
those weak with sorrow find joy.
May the hopeless find hope,
constant happiness and prosperity.*

*May there be timely rains
and bountiful harvests;
May all the medicines be effective,
and wholesome prayers bear fruit.*

*May all who are sick and ill
quickly be freed from their ailments.
Whatever diseases there are in the
world,
may they never occur again.*

*May the frightened cease to be afraid;
and those bound be freed.
May the powerless find power,
and the people think of benefiting each
other.*

*For as long as space remains,
for as long as sentient beings remain,
until then may I too remain,
to dispel the miseries of the world.*

Discourse on Love

He or she who wants to attain peace should practice being upright, humble, and capable of using loving speech. He or she will know how to live simply and happily, with senses calmed, without being covetous and carried away by the emotions of the majority. Let him or her not do anything that will be disapproved of by the wise ones.

And this is what he or she contemplates:

May everyone be happy and safe, and may all hearts be filled with joy. May all beings live in security and in peace – beings who are frail or strong, tall or short, big or small, invisible or visible, near or far away, already born, or yet to be born.

May all of them dwell in perfect tranquility.

Let no one do harm to anyone.

Let no one put the life of anyone in danger.

Let no one, out of anger or ill will, wish anyone any harm.

Just as a mother loves and protects her only child at the risk of her own life, cultivates boundless love to offer to all living beings in the entire cosmos.

Let our boundless love pervade the whole universe, above, below, and across. Our love will know no obstacles.

Our heart will be absolutely free from hatred and enmity.

Whether standing or walking, sitting or lying, as long as we are awake, we should maintain this mindfulness of love in our own heart.

This is the noblest way of living.

Free from wrong views, greed, and sensual desires, living in beauty and realizing Perfect Understanding, those who practice boundless love will certainly transcend birth and death.

By the firm determination of this truth, may you ever be well.

Metta Sutta, Sutta Nipata 1.8

(From Thich Nhat Hanh's translation)

Dharma Talks & Discussions

*Everyone recites this before each Dharma talk or discussion:

“Homage to Shakyamuni Buddha Our Original Teacher.” (three times)

Core Topics in Mahayana Zen Dharma Talks

Buddha’s teachings are discussed during Dharma talks, and discussions are deeply rooted in the Sutras that form the foundation of Mahayana Zen practice. These essential texts include the Heart Sutra, Lotus Sutra, Diamond Sutra, Platform Sutra, Vimalakirti Sutra, and Lankavatara Sutra. Each of these Sutras offers profound insights into Buddhist wisdom and guides practitioners on the path to awakening.

Fundamental Tenets of Practice

The basic principles explored in these sessions encompass the the Three Jewels, the Three Poisons, the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, the Five Skandhas, and the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination. These core teachings are discussed in depth, providing a solid framework for understanding the nature of suffering, the path to liberation, and the structure of human experience.

Additional Topics and Schools of Thought

Dharma talks also address other important areas, such as Ethical & Moral Buddhist Principles, the Abidharma (Philosophy), the Yogacara school of thought, and the Dhammapada. By exploring these subjects, practitioners gain a broader perspective on Buddhist philosophy and practice, enriching their understanding and application of the teachings.

Discussion Engagement and Participation

The focus of these discussions remains on the fundamentals of the teachings, and participation from members of the Sangha is strongly encouraged. This collaborative approach fosters a deeper exploration of the Dharma, allowing each member to contribute insights and questions, thereby supporting collective growth and realization.

The Four Bodhisattva Vows

(Everyone recites together at the end of each practice session)

Living beings are numberless; I vow to free them.

Afflictions are inexhaustible; I vow to transform them.

Dharma gates are boundless; I vow to enter them.

The Awakened Way is unsurpassable; I vow to realize it.

(Bell, Bell - Half bow)