

listening to the sound of a bell

Bells are used in many cultures around the world to help people come together, to create harmony within oneself and harmony with others. In many Asian countries, every family has at least one small bell in their home. You can use any kind of bell that makes a sound you enjoy. Use the sound of that bell as a reminder to breathe, to quiet your mind, to come home to your body, and to take care of yourself. In Buddhism, the sound of the bell is considered to be the voice of the Buddha. Stop talking. Stop thinking. Come back to your breathing. Listen with all your being.

This way of listening allows peace and joy to penetrate every cell of your body. You listen not only with your ears, not only with your intellect; you invite all the cells in your body to join in listening to the bell.

A bell doesn't take up much space. You could surely find room on a table or a shelf somewhere, no matter where you live, even if you share a small room. Before you invite the bell to come home with you, you must make sure that the sound of the bell is good. The bell doesn't need to be big, but the sound should be pleasant.

Prepare yourself each time to listen and to receive the sound of the bell. Instead of "striking" the bell, "invite" the bell to sound. Look at the bell as a friend, an enlightened being that helps you wake up and come home to yourself. If you wish, you can set the bell on a small cushion—just like any other bodhisattva doing sitting meditation.

As you listen to the bell, practice breathing in and releasing all the tension that's built up, releasing the habit of your body, and especially your mind, to run. Although you may be sitting down, very often you are still running within. The bell is a welcome opportunity for you to go back to yourself, enjoy your in-breath and out-breath in such a way that you can release the tension and come to a full stop. The bell, and your response to it, helps stop the runaway train of thoughts and emotions racing through you all throughout the day and night.

In the morning, before you go to work or before the children go to school, everyone can sit down together and enjoy breathing for three sounds of the bell. That way you begin your day with peace and joy. It's nice to sit there, to breathe, either on your own or with your family, and look at a meaningful object in your home or a tree outside your window and smile. This can become a regular practice, a reliable refuge right there in your house or apartment. It doesn't take a long time, and it's richly rewarding. It is a very beautiful practice, the practice of peace, presence, and harmony in the home.

