

## Hearing the bell

*This article is an introductory summary of the teachings of Zen Master Thích Thông Triệt on the topic, mainly based on the oral teaching of Bhikkhuni Zen Master Thích Nữ Triệt Như given for the Fundamental Meditation Course. For a comprehensive in-depth understanding, the reader is encouraged to attend the complete nine-seminar teaching program and read the writings of Master Thích Thông Triệt that are being progressively translated into English.*

### **Practice steps**

When we hear the bell, we *just hear the bell* and *keep our awareness that we are hearing the bell*.

We sit in the sitting meditation posture, that is with our back straight, head straight, body relaxed, eyes half-closed looking down about two to three hand-spans in front of us, one hand on top of the other and the thumbs touching each other.

When we listen to the bell, we follow the singing sound of the bell. When we do so, the span of our wordless awareness is lengthened.

When we practice, we *maintain our awareness*, and therefore we should feel alert. If we feel sleepy, we are practicing incorrectly.

When we practice correctly and have stopped the wandering thoughts in our mind, we activate the parasympathetic nervous system. This system has nerves that connect to the eyes, and when it is activated, the eyes will tend to close. However we shouldn't feel sleepy.

When practicing this technique, we should listen for at least five minutes and will get better results if we practice for longer. Our mind will become quiet. This technique is a form of samatha meditation. When our mind stays in a steady and stable flow of wordless awareness, we enter the realm of samādhi meditation.

### **Effect of practice**

When we practice hearing the bell, like when we practice relaxing the tongue, we activate our wordless awareness. In this instance, we are activating ultimate hearing.

Just like when we practice relaxing the tongue, after the stimulus reaches ultimate hearing, it gets to the hypothalamus, then the parasympathetic nervous system, causing the release of acetylcholine and other similar resulting effects on our inner organs.

There are a few minor differences in the effect of the two techniques. In the case of the relaxing-the-tongue technique, we experience a greater release of saliva, and as a result, we will have a better appetite and digestion. Also, the relaxing the tongue technique can be practiced anywhere, whereas we need a bell and a place where we can ring the bell in order to practice hearing the bell.

Another variant of the hearing-the-bell technique is listening to the sound of waves or of trickling water. The key is to listen to sounds that do not have content as this makes it easier to keep our mind silent. Once we have become experienced in our practice, we can listen to conversations, criticisms and praises while our mind remains calm, serene and detached.

