

STRIKING THE BELL
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ASSISTANT PUBLISHER

It was a pitiable sound—tinny and feeble. Thus began the recitation of gongyo at an SGI-USA community center the other night. The source of this rather inauspicious beginning? The much abused bell.

Curious, I examined its body more closely. The signs of misuse were obvious. It had been beaten into complete submission, albeit with much sincere and heartfelt gusto. Its skin was no longer lustrous, youthful and smooth.

Rather it had the look of a battered war veteran—crinkled and scarred. I pondered how many beatings it must have endured.

Sound familiar? There are many such veterans of friendly wars in our centers across the land. In the interest of saving new generations of bells from further indignities, here is a guide for striking the bell—how to do it and how not to do it. Of course, using a bell is simply a formality. But if we're going to do it, let's do it right.

Enjoy a rekindled, passionate relationship with the bell. The bell is, after all, your friend. Be kind to your friends, and they will serve you well.

Instructions for Striking the Bell

1) Where should the bell be struck? The rounded side skin of the bell is its thinnest and weakest part. It is also where the sound emanates from. The bell should not be struck on the side. Striking a bell there with even moderate strength can dent it, and one dent begins its collapse. The thicker rim that encircles the top of the bell is stronger and designed to be struck—it's where the sound is initiated.

2) What part of the bell ringer should hit the bell? The tip or end of the bell ringer should not strike the bell. Rather, the shaft of the ringer should contact the bell.

3) How to correctly strike the bell? The shaft of the bell ringer should strike, with modest strength, the top rim of the bell. This will produce the best sound and greatly extend the life expectancy of the bell.