

SERVING THE DHARMA CLASS AS BELLMASTER: A Step-by-Step Overview

General guidelines:

- Approach your service as bellmaster with an open heart and calm mind. This is a practice of mindfulness for yourself and a gift of your mindfulness to others.
- Please practice the service before it is your turn to be bellmaster. You can borrow a bell from the monastery or, better yet, purchase one for your own use at home.
- Whenever you are not serving as bellmaster, pay attention. We learn by paying attention to how others perform. This also will help acquaint you with the format of our service.
- Place the bell directly in front of you and sit up straight.
- When sounding the bell, leave enough time between rings to allow for a breath. Don't rush ringing the bell, but don't ring too slowly, either. *Ring. Breathe. Ring. Breathe. Ring. Breathe. Stop the bell.*
- Strike the bell on the lip, not on the side. This gives the most pleasing sound.
- Whenever people are moving—standing up, sitting down, stretching—wait until everyone has settled before ringing the bell to mark the next part of the service.

PROCEDURES FOR SERVICE

Opening meditation (9 a.m.)

1. Wake the bell then sound it three times, allowing enough time for a breath between each ring. Stop the last ring.
All bow.
2. INCENSE OFFERING
"Please rise for the incense offering."
Mokugyo master lights and offers incense, reciting verse. When the verse is finished, ring the hand bell once for all to bow.
3. THREE REFUGES
Mokugyo master recites Three Refuges. After each refuge verse, ring the big bell once. Everyone prostrates. Stop the bell to signal all to rise. At the end of the Three Refuges, all bow a half-bow (from the waist).
4. PROSTRATIONS
Bellmaster recites verse and leads all in 30 prostrations using small bell. Ring bell, prostrate, stop bell to signal all to rise for each of the 30 prostrations. After the 30th, ring small bell twice to signal last prostration. Ring bell once for half-bow.

All turn to face cushions. Ring bell once for half-bow. All sit.
5. SUTRA CHANTING
Wake the bell then sound it three times, stopping the last ring.
Mokugyo master begins. ("O" indicates inviting the bell, "X" indicates inviting the mokugyo.)

"We will now recite the _____ Sutra, which can be found in your folder."

X XX
O
X
O
X
O
X XX X
O O [stop]

Collect the red folders: "Please pass the red folders to the front."

6. SITTING MEDITATION

Wake the bell then sound it three times, stopping the last ring.

Recite the verse, "Breathing in, I calm my mind. Breathing out, I smile."

Sound the bell once, allowing sound to die away.

After 15 minutes, wake the bell softly then sound it three times, stopping the last ring.

Allow all time to stretch. When all have re-settled, wake the bell and sound it three times, stopping the last ring.

7. Presiding Dharma teacher begins the class. At this point, he/she may rise. The bellmaster says, "Please rise to bow to the Buddha and then to the Sangha." Ring the small bell once, facing the Buddha, and then one, facing each other.

Walking Meditation (10:30 a.m.)

1. Ring the small bell to signal the end of presentation period. All bow.

"Please rise for walking meditation." All stand up. Invite everyone to go outside, forming a circle, or, if the weather is inclement, invite all to form a circle around the cushions.

Wake the small bell and ring once. All bow to center. Turn to left. Ring bell once.

All bow. Ring bell once and begin walking.

After 15 minutes, wake the bell and ring it once. All stop and bow. Ring bell once.

All turn to center. Ring bell once. All bow and return to cushions.

2. Presiding Dharma teacher begins second half of class.

Closing Meditation (11:45 a.m.)

1. Ring the small bell to signal the end of the discussion period. All bow.

Wake the bell, then sound it three times, allowing enough time for a breath between rings. Stop the bell after the last ring.

Recite the verse, "Breathing in, I calm my mind. Breathing out, I smile."

Sound the bell once, allowing sound to die away.

After 15 minutes, wake the bell softly then sound it three times, stopping the last ring.

Allow all time to stretch. When all have re-settled, wake the bell and sound it three times, stopping the last ring.

2. SHARING THE MERIT

"Let us share the merits of our practice by reciting the closing verse." Lead the recitation.

Wake the bell, then sound it three times, stopping the last ring. All bow.

3. BOW TO BUDDHA AND SANGHA

“Please rise and bow to the Buddha and then to the sangha.”

When all are standing and facing the altar, sound the small bell once and half-bow.

Then all turn to face center. Sound the small bell once and half-bow.