

Call and Response



Church bells call out to illicit a response from those who hear them. Call and response is a central aspect of all forms of human communication and a tradition in many forms of music around the world. A call is used as a means of getting a response in classrooms, in the military, in churches and at sporting events. Some calls are positive and helpful, for example a foghorn to keep ships safe, or the chimes of an ice cream van! Some are less positive, but important, a fire alarm or police siren. Some sounds are made to let people know that a significant event is taking place. All tell people that something is happening and are intended to initiate a response. Most religions have sounds that are used to produce a response from individuals or groups.

Calling the Faithful

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Buddhist Bells



Tingsha bells are small cymbals used in prayer and rituals by Tibetan Buddhists. These and hand bells are used when offerings are made at the shrine and their sound informs the faithful that prayers and offerings are being made, suggesting that they respond with prayers and offerings of their own.

Hindu Puja Bells



Bells are generally hung at the mandir (temple) in front of the shrine. When a Hindu enters they ring the bell and offer a prayer (puja). It is said that by ringing the bell, the devotee informs God of their arrival. At the same time (and when rung by a priest) the bell lets others know that worship is taking place and calls them to make a response in the form of puja.

Jewish Shofar



The shofar is one of the earliest musical instruments. Made from the horn of a ram, a goat, sheep, or antelope, it is used to call out at the start of Jewish festivals. On Shabbat (the Sabbath) its call reminds people to observe the mitzvah (commandment) to rest on the seventh day of the week, to respond with specific actions, to give thanks and to worship.

Muslim Adhan

The adhan (pronounced azhan) is the Islamic call to prayer. It is recited five times a day at prescribed times. The call is made by a man called a muezzin. The root of the word adhan is the Arabic word 'adhina' which means to hear or to be informed. The expected response to hearing the adhan is salah (prayer).

Sikh "Bole So Nihal, Sat Sri Akal"

In Sikh worship at key points in a service, the leader calls to the faithful "Bole So Nihal" which means "Blessed is the person who says this" and the response is the reply "Sat Sri Akal," or "God is Truth!"

Church Bells



One of the most important sounds associated with churches is the sound of bells. Bells were introduced around 400 CE by Paulinus of Nola. Their use in Britain was popularised by priests, monks and friars, many of who came here from other countries as missionaries. In 750 CE Egbert, the Archbishop of York, ordered all priests to toll their bell at certain times. St Dunstan, Bishop of London and Archbishop of Canterbury, hung bells in all the churches under his care during the late 10th Century.

Church bells call out to remind Christians to respond with worship, reflection or action; they also ring out to mark significant rites of passage such as marriage and death, and on important religious and state occasions.

Bells provide a soundtrack to Christianity. The ringing of a hand bell in a church service, a single church or Sanctus bell, or the majesty of a whole peal, has become part of the country's heritage. Over the centuries they have called people to prayer, to take part in the Eucharist, to celebrate, to take up arms, and to acknowledge peace. In times of crisis, commemoration and celebration they have called all people to come together and respond as a community.