

Jewel in the heart

by [Jeff Gundy](#) in the [December 25, 2007](#) issue

It came to me as I waited at the desk, thinking how to turn another scattered group toward the day's work: *I want a bell*. Not the electric commands that drilled through our younger days,

not some jingly tinkle. No, something small but clear—a signal, a reminder, a request. After Christmas we went looking and my son found a pair of heavy, small brass disks joined

by a leather thong at the import place in town. They had eight raised symbols in a ring, some scratchy lettering inside. When he struck them the pure tone hung for seven seconds

in the air, shimmering and clean as the sun. Of course I bought them. Each day now I put them on the desk, try to keep them quiet. They want nothing but to ring. They desire not to join but to meet.

When it's time I hold the thong close to each disk and strike them at right angles to each other, as I learned from a man who told me that their true name is *tingsha*, that in Tibet the monks strike them

when minds start to ramble. Inside, he told me, were the great and ancient words, *Om mani padme hum*. We might say: *See the jewel in the heart of the lotus*. He rubbed the symbols on the top: here

is the conch shell, he said, here the prayer wheel, the umbrella, the flower. The students smile each time I strike the chimes, hold them as the sound wavers, fades. It lasts such a long time.

Such a short time. And then we begin, teasing new sounds from the old tongue as we can, taking the next steps across the rocky plain, following the smoky thread on the horizon.

We fold out the map and it tells us where we might be.

We study the compass and it offers some names. We open

the timepiece and it says, Be quiet. Bring the chimes together.