



For this meditation you may need to go to your nearest 'green belt' park, or it can be done in your garden, provided it is populated by at least one bird and is within hearing of some fairly distant traffic. The meditation may be done sitting comfortably (provided the weather is not cold or wet), standing or walking evenly up and down. Or you can even do it sitting indoors beside an open window.

Take a little time deciding on this and generally settling down, before turning your attention to the sounds round about you. At this point, unless you have decided to do a walking meditation, you may like to let your eyes close and begin the sound-meditation proper. Closing the eyes makes concentration on sound much easier.

Begin now to focus your attention on your hearing: Start by noting all the different sounds that you can hear - birds singing, dogs barking, children at play, people at work, aircraft, radio-cassettes, machinery and, of course, the traffic.

Do not let yourself be annoyed at some of the manmade sounds that you might usually object to, for instance, neighbours playing loud music in the garden next door. Stay nice and calm. Simply note each sound and then wait on the next, making no judgment for or against any one of them. Allow the sounds to happen and do not strain to hear them. Relax and let each sound register on your consciousness.

Gradually let your mind form a 'sound-picture', putting the sounds together in various groupings, for example: birds/animals. . . human voices. . . machines. Another way to group sounds might be: very near to me. . some distance away. . . far away. Spend a little while letting the sounds flow through and around your mind. Enjoy this part of the exercise as much as possible. After about five minutes you should be ready for the core of the meditation.

From among all the sounds that are recurring, select the nearest and strongest of the bird noises. Preferably this will be of a song-bird such as a blackbird or thrush. However, even a crow will suffice, if need be! Study the pattern of the notes, pick out the melody, measure the silent interval before the melody is repeated. Let yourself be entertained for at least a few minutes by the birdsong.

Now turn your attention to the traffic noise. Just take note of the total sound. Wondering about what kind of vehicle might be causing each sound will only be a distraction. Observe the droning, ebb and flow pattern woven out of the hummings of many different engines. Hear it as a resonant base supporting the bird's solo performance. Note the contrast in pitch and rhythm between bird and traffic sounds. At this stage if you find your attention being drawn to other sounds such as the wind or the songs of other birds, then feel free to broaden the subject of your meditation to include these also. Spend a while reflecting on the different sounds and comparing them to one another.

Now begin to 'switch off' your mind and allow yourself to 'flow' with the sound that you are hearing. The important thing now is not the identity of the different sounds or where they are coming from, but simply the sensation of hearing.

Identify yourself completely with your sense of hearing - 'I am hearing'. Let yourself become your hearing. Forget about yourself and simply hear. Whether you are hearing birds, animals, human or mechanical sounds doesn't matter now. What is important is the fact that you are listening, that you have been able to become physically and mentally passive to the sound that is reaching you. If you can manage to practise this kind of listening over a period of some weeks, you may be able to develop an awareness of that first 'Sound' that lies behind the countless millions of individual sounds that have ever vibrated throughout the world. For Christians the first Sound is associated with the eternal Word, the Logos, the Son of God, who appeared in the flesh as Jesus: 'Before the world was created, the Word already existed; he was with God, and he was the same as God' (John 1.1), and 'The Word became a human being and, full of grace and truth, lived among us' (John 1.14). We may say that God is Sound almost in the same way as we say that God is Love. Just as it is possible to come to know God through the experience of human love, so also it is possible to be brought to a sense of God through the rich texture of sound that fills the universe. We can be relaxed and brought to wholeness by listening to the pure sounds of nature or the music of great composers or by the repetition of a simple chant or mantra. There is absolutely no sound, however jarring it may seem at first, that we cannot use in order to get closer to God in a listening meditation. Nevertheless, we will find that meditating through certain natural or musical sounds is easier and more effective than through others. My choice of music for meditation ranges from the majestic, subtle choral work of Bach's Mass in B Minor to some repetitive Sanskrit chants from Fr Bede Griffith's ashram in South India.