

Shorodo Bell Tower

For centuries, Edo townsfolk relied on the tolling of Zojoji's great bronze bell to tell time. The 15-ton, 3.3-meter-tall bell hangs in a wooden tower just inside the Sanmon Gate. It was cast in 1673 on the orders of Ietsuna, the fourth Tokugawa Shogun (1641–1680). It could be heard throughout the city, and some claimed it was even audible as far as Kisarazu, a fishing village some 35 kilometers across Tokyo Bay.

For most of its life the bell was rung three times a day—morning, noon, and evening—though now it is only rung twice, at 5:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. The deep resonance of the bell is particularly impressive in the *joya no kane* ceremony on the night of New Year's Eve, when it is struck 108 times, symbolizing the cleansing of the 108 desires accumulated over the past year. The bell is hung from the tower by a bronze dragon's head which is visible from the western side of the inside of the tower.

The bell survived World War II, when many bronze antiquities were melted down: Zojoji's bell was apparently too bulky and heavy to be easily transported.