

PEACEFUL AWAKENINGS: TAKING THE “ALARM” OUT OF THE ALARM CLOCK

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The quality of my daily awakening ritual changed dramatically a few months ago when I was exposed to the Timex Nature Sounds alarm clock. Prior to this, it had never occurred to me to use something other than the traditional buzzer-type alarm clock that I had had since 1986 because “it still worked.” While this was true, it worked by emitting a loud obnoxious sound that stimulated a fight or flight response. Now, I start the day with nature sounds (“ocean surf”), which is much more peaceful than my old alarm clock.

Do you start your day with the sound of an alarm clock? Does this sound gently convey to you that it is time to wake up or does it produce a startle response that jolts you into the day? The traditional buzzer-type alarm clock seems appropriately named. “Alarm” is defined as “a warning signal or device; the terror caused by sudden danger” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2004, p. 17) and “to warn of danger; synonymous with frighten” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2004, p. 18). Is this state of alarm necessary? Why do we continue to use a “warning signal” that causes “terror” when other options exist? Why would we want “fright” to be the first conscious experience of the day and how does this affect our mood, affect, and disposition throughout the day?

There are many awakening devices that are much less alarming for a smoother sleep-to-wake transition. Soft, gentle sounds such as nature sounds and soft music may not awaken those of you who sleep deeply and perhaps must use several traditional alarm clocks just to awaken, but it could be a good alternative for others. Products that produce sounds of nature, Tibetan-style gongs (www.serenityhealth.com) or chimes (www.now-zen.com) are readily available. If you prefer light (“sunlight”) over sound to gently awaken you, the “dawn light simulator” is an alternative. A simple Google search will capture a wide range of options ranging from the “Jwin JL-414 Four Nature Sound AM/FM Alarm Clock Radio” for \$10.99 (www.amazon.com) to the more expensive “Rise and Shine Natural Light Alarm Clock Bedside Lamp” for \$149.99 (www.NexTag.com).

I feel fortunate to have taken the alarm out of the alarm clock. Tonight when I go to bed, I know that tomorrow morning I will be gently awakened by sounds of the beach—to sounds of waves lapping against the shore and to seagulls flying overhead—and it will make a difference in my mood and disposition. How will you awaken and what effect will it have on your day?

REFERENCES

1. (2004) *Merriam-Webster dictionary* Merriam-Webster , Springfield, MA