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## *The flow of the moment*

FOR MANY PEOPLE LIFE IS like a vending machine. We put coins in at the top, push a button, and get results from the bottom. We don't care about what goes on in between. We think it's not our business—it's the machine's business. This is modern civilization. So when it comes to practice, we think all we have to do is put the coin in. We receive zazen instruction, and we expect that in the next moment a Pepsi-Cola will roll out. We completely forget the moment-to-moment process of practice.

At first we sit with the expectation that something wonderful is going to happen. But as we continue to sit, we learn how we participate in the flow of time. Gradually we begin to pay attention. Gradually we begin to notice a shortening of the distance between cause and effect. Gradually we learn to see that at the very moment we touch the coin, the result appears—a Pepsi-Cola!

In eating a meal, what is the shortest time between cause and effect? If we become one with eating the meal, we don't know. All we have to do is eat. Each day we wake up, but it is only in the instant *after* we have awakened that we realize it. Within waking up, we have no idea of waking up. Our practice is to be in the flow of this moment, before we put a label on it called "waking up." Because we are already one with waking up, this is waking up as it is.

When we are in the flow of the moment, cause and effect,

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## *You Have to Say Something*

subject and object, all appear together. You can't put a label on this moment. Yet this moment is working. It's alive.

Zen texts have many stories about awakening to this basic nature of existence. In one such story, the sixth patriarch asked one of his students, "Can you grasp vast, open space?"

"Yes, I can," answered the student, and he reached up, grabbing at empty space.

"That's good," said the patriarch, "but it isn't grasping space as it is."

The student said, "How do you grasp space as it is?"

Immediately, the patriarch pinched the student's nose. The student screamed, "Ouch! Too rough!" But within his very own scream, between the time he said "Ouch!" and "Too rough!" he attained enlightenment.

The point of studying Buddhism is not to put a lot of stuff in your head. It is to guide your consciousness closer and closer to the original nature of existence. This is "space-as-it-is." How do we awaken to this? Just participate in the flow of *this moment* as it is. Just open your heart.