

**Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi**  
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Dōgen-zenji said sickness does not, you know, destroy—destroy people, but no practice will destroy people. Sickness does not destroy people, but no practice destroy people. What do you mean [laughs]? What does it mean? "No practice destroy people."

If, you know, we have no idea of practice, sickness—even sickness does not mean anything, you know, because when we cannot practice, we call it sick- [partial word]—sickness. But, you know, if you have no idea of practice, what is sickness? Maybe for the people whose purpose of life is to enjoy life, you know, when he cannot enjoy his life, it is sickness. But it is—that idea is self-contradiction, you know, because sickness is also a part of [laughs]—part of life. Maybe because he want to enjoy our life, he want to enjoy in its—enjoy in its more common sense—common sensitivity—enjoy our life. When you cannot enjoy our life, it is sickness [laughs], but, you know, sickness also, you know, [is] a part of life, especially when you become old. You will be al- [partial word]—almost everyday you will be sick [laughs]. So that—that does not, you know, mean anything to the old people.

So how to enjoy our old life is, you know, to have the idea of practice. When someone cannot [laughs] practice, you know: "Oh, I am sick." [Laughs.] "It means something." But even in their bed, you know, they have, you know, something to do: to have more better practice or more formal practice. So they—they will try to, you know, keep up more ordinal [ordinary?] way of practice, having medicine or—or something. Anyway, he will try.

That is a part of practice. That kind of—when—so when we have idea of practice, you know, we—we will not—we don't lose ourselves. But when you have no idea of practice, in its true sense, you will be—you will lose, you know, your meaning of life. Here you will find out that idea, you know, if you—if your purpose of life is to enjoy your life, there is some, you know, something is missing there. It is not complete. The joy of life cannot be a complete, you know—perfect purpose cannot be a purpose of life because [?] only the true idea of practice wi- [partial word: will?]- can be a purpose of life.

Without any purpose of life, we cannot live, and if, you know, even though you have purpose of life, the purpose—when purpose of life is not good enough or perfect enough, then you will lose yourself. You will lose your meaning of life. So when—only when you have complete purpose of life, you—you can survive—you can have a life—have a true joy of life, wherever you are, whenever it—it may be: in sickness, in adversity, or

whatever happen to you, you will still have joy of life. You can enjoy sickness even.

So to—to be ill means, you know, to have another practice there. This kind of life—the life with purpose or practice—that practice will be the practice which help themselves and which help others. To do things with people—not—not just help himself—to help others—this kind of practice—if you—if your purpose of life is to help yourself, to help others, then whenever you are, you will have chance to practice.

When I was young, I have my teacher—I had my teacher. But when I was thirty-two, I lost my teacher. He passed away.<sup>1</sup> So I had not much chance to, you know, practice under my teacher. But—under my master [corrects "teacher"], but I—I had some other masters. So I could practice—I could continue my practice. But it is important for you, you know, to have more intimate relationship with your teacher, which you don't have here. [At] Zen Center, we have too many teachers, so I am sorry we haven't [laughs] give you this kind of, you know, practice.

But that is very important. But if you have true, you know—if you understand true—what is true practice or purpose of true life, wherever you are, even without teacher, you can practice pretty well, as I did after [age] thirty-two. [Laughs.] For an instance, you know, when I was [at] Soko-ji, as some of—I told you many times [laughs], but still I want to talk—tell—I want to talk about [it] again—because I found, you know, tremendous joy of practice when I was—each time I went to the grocery store—grocery store to buy some vegetables. I would choose, you know, the fruit which is, you know, almost, you know, almost going to, you know, rotten [laughs]—soft, you know.

If grapefruit is soft, it is—it mean it is not already so good, you know. Grapefruit is sour, but soft, you know, grapefruits with—with—even though it—it has no mold on it, it taste bitter, you know [laughs]. Do you know the taste? Fresh one is only sour, but old one is bitter. I will choose, you know, that kind of soft grapefruits or vegetables with lead [red? dead?] leaves already on it. I found there my practice. When I divide something, you know, one grapefruit with someone else, you know, I give the top part to someone—someone, and the bottom part I take. Top part is usually better than bottom part, even though top part is small, you know. Maybe you will take [laughs] top part, don't you? [Laughs, laughter.] But I take bottom part. You may feel strange [laughs], you know. If I explain my way, you may feel very strange. But I found there, you know, a kind of practice when I eat.

So it is not matter of "That," you know, "practice is good or bad," you know. When you say, "My practice is wrong," you [laughs]—your purpose

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<sup>1</sup> Gyokujun So-on Suzuki is said to have died on May 3, 1934. Suzuki-rōshi was born on May 18, 1904, so there is some discrepancy in dates.

of life is, you know, something different from me. That is why you say, "Oh, that practice is very poor," you know, "very strange," you know. But to me it is not strange. That is, you know, my practice.

Of course, you cannot be—as long as you live in this society, you cannot be always like that [laughs]. You cannot be always like that but, you know, if the purpose of life is established within yourself, you will make your best, and, you know, when it is possible, you will do it. When it is not impossible—you find it difficult or impossible, you—you will not do it. But even why it is, you know, why it is difficult to practice is because our society is sick [laughs], you know. Sick. So we cannot practice it.

But "sick" means something, you know. When we sick—when we say our society is sick, you know, that "sick"—that idea of sickness is based on true practice. When [laughs] your, you know, understanding what you mean by, you know, sickness is based on some idea of purpose of life, then you have to fight with society, you know. You will be very much disappointed with society, as you don't feel so good when you are sick.

So "sickness," we say, but real meaning of sickness, you know—if you think about the sickness more, according to the person, the real meaning of sickness will [laughs]—will—will be quite different.

Buddha left us the teaching which could be real medicine of true sickness. So Buddhist, you know, has—knows what is sickness for each one of us, and what is sickness for the society. So we know how—what is the remedy, or how to, you know, confront with the sickness we have. That is why we call him a good doctor. Buddha—another name of Buddha is Good Doctor.

Thank you very much.

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Source: Original City Center tape. Verbatim transcript by Bill Redican (January 5, 2000).