**NYTT Philosophy 101 – Essay Question:**

**Read Lines II.34 and II.35 from chapter two of the Yoga Sutra’s of Patanjali. Summarize, in your own words, the meaning of these sutras. Explain how they can be used in your life, with people you find difficult, in your practice and in teaching your students.**

II.34 “Negative thoughts are violence, etc. They may be [personally] performed, performed on one’s behalf, or authorized by oneself; they may be triggered by greed, anger, or delusion; and they may be slight, moderate, or extreme in intensity. One should cultivate counteracting thoughts, namely, that the end results [of negative thoughts] are ongoing suffering and ignorance.”

II.35 “In the presence of one who is established in non-violence, enmity is abandoned.”

*(quoted from Edward F. Bryant, “The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali”, New York, 2014)*

*The first sutra, II.34, specifies that violence does not first occur in the moment when a person (or being) is physically or verbally attacked and harmed, but that it starts already in the thoughts of an individual, namely, in the form of negative thoughts. It doesn’t matter how or why those negative thoughts arise, nor how intense they are; as soon as they occupy a person’s mind, they start to unfold their destructive character and cause suffering and ignorance in the person who is thinking them. Therefore, that person should actively cultivate thoughts that go against those negative thoughts, always keeping in mind that negative thoughts only promote further suffering.*

*The second sutra, II.35, states that it is impossible to be permanently hostile towards a person that is truly non-violent.*

*The two sutras stress the importance of our thoughts and intentions when it comes to actions and interactions with others. Whereas one might think that only the behavior of a person defines them as aggressive or peaceful, the sutras insist that violence indeed starts in the mind and already takes place if somebody is having negative thoughts.*

*In our daily life, this should make us wary: We might think that it’s okay to experience dislike, mistrust or aversion towards a person as long as we don’t express these thoughts in our actions and words toward that person. But actually – if we believe the sutras – our negative thoughts about a person are already causing harm, if not to the other person, then at least to ourselves.*

*Instead of accepting the presence of negative thoughts or even blaming them on characteristics of the other person (e.g., “This guy is making so much noise in class, he’s such an inconsiderate person”), the sutras invite us to analyze the real source of our negative thoughts and their consequences. We’ll realize that our negative thoughts are triggered by feelings that are instinctive or ingrained patterns of our behavior (in our example, “The noise distracts me, and this distraction causes irritation which leads me to react in an unnerved fashion”). Furthermore, the sutras suggest that we actively counteract negative thoughts by realizing that they don’t serve any good purpose but instead only perpetuate our own suffering.*

*This analysis and realization have profound implications for interactions with other people in our daily lives. Instead of blaming negative sensations and thoughts on the person we’re interacting with, they lead us to look inside and understand that we ourselves are the source of this negativity.*

*In interactions “with people you find difficult”, such an approach will shift our attention from “people” and “difficult” to the part of “you find”: We own our perception of somebody else, and we own our reactions to that perception – and what we own we can control. Instead of focusing on what’s (“objectively”) wrong with the other person, we can focus on why we (“subjectively”) respond to that person in a particular negative way. Once we realize that our unease around such a person is not directly caused by their behavior but by our negative feelings and thoughts, we can tackle the latter (which is something that we actually have control over) instead of the former (which we can’t control), and thus change our response to this person.*

*The same holds true for interactions with students in a teaching environment, where negative thoughts may occur both within the teacher as well as within the student. Those negative thoughts might concern a person directly (“This student never gets a pose right, he’s simply too stupid to understand instructions”; “This teacher always picks the most difficult poses, she’s such a show-off”, etc.) or a part of our practice (“I hate this pose”; “I hope I don’t fail again doing backbends”, etc.). Again, realizing that the suffering we experience in the presence of a certain student, teacher, or doing a specific pose is not directly caused by the person or pose itself but by our negative thoughts about it, we can start changing our reactions in the face of such a challenge. It will finally turn us into a more understanding, patient and compassionate student, teacher and/or practitioner of yoga.*

*As for the sutra II.35, it takes a long time and a lot of practice to be completely free of negative thoughts. As long as they still arise, there’s always the risk of negative, aggressive, violent behavior as a consequence. But every time that we manage to actively cultivate the notion that our negative thoughts only cause further suffering (first for ourselves and then for other people if we act upon them) and thus free ourselves from their grip, we might experience the positive change in our interactions.*

*If we choose to not respond to our negative thoughts that arise in the presence of another person, our very response to that person changes, too. Instead of giving in to an aggression-provoking knee-jerk mechanisms (“This person irritates me, so I’ll give them a hard time in return”, which most likely will be retaliated by the other person in the exact same way), we can see our reaction for what it is (“I’m irritated, but I own this irritation”), see the other person for what they are (“I might not know why this person behaves this way, but I know that they are not different from me in their personal experience, joy and suffering”) and interrupt the cycle of aggression - counter aggression (“I’ll treat this person with respect and compassion”). Once we treat people this way, they are a lot less likely to respond aggressively to us, and thus animosity and enmity finally dissipate on both sides.*