**Essay Question:**

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

2.34 vitarkah himsadayah krita karita anumoditah lobha krodha moha purvakah mridu madhya adhimatrah dukha ajnana ananta phala iti pratipaksha bhavanam

This Sutra essentially describes “we are what we think” in that each thought is the initial spark to the flame of action. When we cultivate negative thoughts or feelings, those that are rooted in ignorance and violence toward ourselves or others, we produce actions that conflict with our practice of the Yamas and Niyamas. Thoughts of anger lead to violence; Thoughts of greed grow into coveting and stealing, and so on.

No matter their intensity, delusional thoughts (due to *avidya*) perpetuate *duhka,* suffering. Conversely, thoughts rooted in *vidya* manifest wise actions, free from the inherent obstacles of perceived separation from all that is not “me” or “mine”. The mind is then not confused by the *klesas* of ignorance, egoism, attachment, aversion, nor the fear of death, thus producing wholesome and harmonious actions in pure awareness. So when one experiences thoughts or feelings implying violence, one can invoke a positive thought to oppose it, as positivity in the heart and mind are always stronger than their negative counterparts.

When negative thoughts arise during interactions with people deemed “difficult”, we can pause to listen to this thought and question its origin: Am I irritated by a characteristic in this person which is simply a reflection of one which I myself am working on? Is this person’s behaviour a manifestation of their suffering? Instead of reacting to the negative thought that arises (which can only be a destructive action), I return to my understanding of non-separation and meet this negative thought with one of compassion and understanding. From there, I can act in a way that is free of harm to this person or to myself.

This Sutra bears relevance in all aspects of a yoga practice, especially in asana and in seated meditation. When I allow negative thoughts to take up space beyond simply acknowledging them, if I allow them to grow, they multiply and diffuse through my mind and body; My practice becomes one of harshness toward myself and separation from the greater experience. My mind narrows and my body tightens, unreceptive to the voice of my breath. Equanimity becomes unattainable as I am distracted by the poison of negative thought. However if I acknowledge the thought wholly before then conjuring a positive stronger one, such as patience, non-judgement, or simply reminding myself of *annica* (impermanence) the harmful thought dissolves and the mind-body becomes calm and present.

2.35 ahiMsaapratiShThaayaaM tatsannidhou vairatyaagaH

This Sutra describes the contagious nature of practicing *ahimsa*, non-violence. As the Yogi cultivates ahimsa, they come to embody non-violence and compassion. The practice and embodiment of this Yama implies a *sattvic* state*,* one of lightness and purity which emanates from the yogi’s being. All beings in the presence of *sattva* will naturally be affected by such a powerful energy: their *rajas* and *tamas* will succumb to the yogi’s *sattva*, and their negativity will now feel out of place, causing them to strive for *ahimsa* through more positive ways of being.

I contemplate this Sutra when I am confronted with aggressive people, as it is a simple way to bring lightness and warmth to such people: I fill my heart with compassion and understanding for their suffering until there is no room for anything but *sattva*, and (if they are receptive) their hostility fades to a calmer state. In the context of a yoga class, I often sense fellow students becoming *rajasic* or *tamasic*. I fill my mind, body, and breath with *Metta Bhavana* for myself and anyone suffering. What becomes clear in such circumstances is that the previous Sutra, which demonstrates the importance of practicing compassion within one’s self, is the necessary precursor to encouraging others to abandon their own negativity.

As an asana teacher, one has the precious responsibility of creating a physical space conducive to openness and awareness. When a student is experiencing negative feelings, this can be perceived in their posture and breath. We can share our practice of Patanjali’s 8 limbs of yoga with students, allowing them to absorb the powers of ahimsa, aparigraha, tapas etc through speech and even consensual touch. Sometimes encouraging mindful breath into a tense part of the body by drawing their awareness to such an area, can be enough to coax them out of negative patterns and into this unique moment.