**Naada Yoga Teacher Training**

**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 sutra’s. Explain how they can be used in your life, with people you find difficult, in your practice and in teaching your students.

***vitarkā hiṁsādayaḥ kr̥ta-kārita-anumoditā lobha-krodha-moha-āpūrvakā mr̥du-madhya adhimātrā duḥkha-ajñāna-ananta-phalā iti pratiprakṣa-bhāvanam ॥34॥***

Violent thoughts (himsa) induce unending suffering and ignorance. It makes no difference whether you’re the perpetrator, the person who gives the orders, or the instigator; or whether the thoughts are provoked by greed, anger, or delusion; or whether small, medium or large scale action is involved. This is why orienting yourself toward the reverse is helpful. ||34||

***ahiṁsā-pratiṣṭhāyaṁ tat-sannidhau vairatyāghaḥ ॥35॥***

Once a condition of durable non-violence (ahimsa) has been established, all enmity will be abandoned in your environment.

*Disclaimer*

*The insight into my interpretation of the above lines is the amalgamation of a multitude of sources: my upbringing and family culture in the Middle East, and my life in North America as a minority, my personal yoga philosophy, my practice and teacher training, and the generous contributions of all those who shared their practice and presence with me either as a teacher or a fellow practitioner.*

Violent thoughts are simply thoughts, manifested with the intention of power assertion or self protection. Thoughts rise from the seeds of our belief systems; what we consider to be our truth which is informed by judgements we have formed based on many factors including religion, socio-economical status, family dynamics, and traumatic experiences. As meaning-making creatures, our minds have the tendency to generates patterns or formulated tactics in order to arrive at swift judgement and decision-making towards harm reduction or coping with situations.

Mind does what it does: creating thoughts, and humans do what humans do: we engage with them, try to create meaning out of them, and allow them to sway our emotions and shape our judgement. There is no doubt that the thinking mind is an integral part of our evolution and survival mechanism, however, in certain cases such as trauma, the purpose has been long served yet the mind continues to play the reactionary thoughts in a loop, and we unknowingly continue to engage. Unhealed trauma and pain can result in a number of negative thought patterns such as shame, inadequacy, non-inclusion, and unworthiness. Internalization of these patterns results in deep pain and agony, which in turn lead to hostile thoughts and attitudes toward self and others. Without awareness or proper healing, these thought may manifest in acts of violence and lead to alienation from the True Self, causing suffering.

Patanjali invites us to take a step back and observe our internal landscape, be it thoughts or emotions. He invites us to simply observe and see them for what they really are, regardless of how big or small, to see them as simple thoughts, created by a chattering mind who is hard at work to create an illusion of reality and feed the False Self. Socio-economical status, education, wealth, or race do not protect us, and excuses as to why and how the thoughts form and how big or small they are do not absolve us. We all fall victim to violent and destructive thoughts at some, or many, points in our lives, but if we have chosen to step onto the path to enlightenment, it is crucial to take on the task of keeping our thoughts in check. Patanjali suggest that in our quest to reach illumination, the best armor against intrusive thoughts is non-judgmental observation, and cultivation of awareness of the mechanics of our mind. One must closely study and understand one’s patterns of thought, and gain mastery over them so as to recognize them the moment they arise, and consciously decide against engaging with them, without judgment or acting out on the emotions that arise as a result. He invites us to step away from duality and step into the ultimate truth. Given the extremely persistent and powerful nature of the mind, mastery over the thoughts without engagement as part of our daily meditation practice is a life-long task and requires discipline and regimented dedication.

In the case of a yoga teacher, this becomes particularly crucial as the teacher/student dynamic is a very delicate one. We must be watchful of thoughts that could lead to attitudes of inflated self-image, blame (of self or other), pride, finding fault, shaming, and claims of superior knowledge. Our thoughts are reflected in our speech and actions, and so we should be continuously asking ourselves weather we are asserting power and authority-and therefore; demanding submission and inviting conflict, or offering guidance and support.

People from different walks of life find their way into our studio, and bring with them a multitude of physical and emotional scars, hoping to find healing and solace in yoga. Vulnerability is at its high and unexpected emotions might come to surface. A teacher’s words, actions, and touch can easily become an act of aggression if constant diligence and monitoring of harmful thoughts are not exercised by the teacher. An honest and in depth assessment and recognition of our biases and our triggers, and deep understanding of delicacies of racial and gender injustices and trauma sensitivity is crucial in creating a collective non-violent practice.

Anger breads anger and violence breads violence. The only way to break this vicious circle is to embrace compassion towards ourselves and others, even in the face of adversity. To be compassionate is to extend our love and acceptance towards everything that has come into being without judgement of how we perceive them, and that, first and foremost, starts from loving ourselves. Harming and violent thoughts mostly arise from our lack of true self-worth and self-confidence, expectation of perfection and lashing out at ourselves for not being able to keep up with our unrealistic standards of performance. This tendency will certainly find its way into our teachings, and before we know it, we are leading a competitive sport instead of guiding a practice of purification.

Fostering compassion, love and seeing beyond the illusional boundaries that separate us from our True Self and others, and appreciating the fragility of the bodies and the souls that have brought their pain and their scars to us, and embracing imperfections in ourselves and others as the unique marks of individuality rather than inability, are all positive steps towards cultivating peace and harmony within ourselves and our surroundings.