Philiosophy 101 Essay by Isabelle Martin

The Yoga Sutra of Patanjali 11.34-11.35

In Chapter 2 of the Yoga Sutra of Patanjali the verse 11.34 discusses and condemns violence. Violence is presented as three fold: Committed, caused or consented. This is a valid warning to a yoga practionner and to an aspiring yoga teacher.

Non-violence (or ahimsa) is often associated with a vegetarian diet. Though physical violence must not be condoned, I would like to focus my reflection on the psychological violence that happens in the yoga community. It is much harder to notice but its potency is a cause for extreme caution. I believe that by noticing these patterns, we can work to change them, for ourselves and for our students. A shift in attitude can also influence the way we act with our families, in raising our children, in interacting with our neighbors, colleagues and community.

The first victim of violence is often ourselves, whether or not we realise it. In our personal practice, it is easy to issue harsh criticism of our physical abilities and limitations. We will be disappointed if we cannot touch our toes, when we could just the day before. We will expect to reach a certain level of practice that is yet unavailable. Going from praise to judgement does not help the mind grow peaceful, to be in the moment. To cultivate a peaceful mind, we must accept each day as an opportunity for practice, be grateful we have made it to the mat and accept the variance in our abilities. It is hard to feel adequate when comparing ourselves to yogis in advanced postures on social media like Instagram. I think kindness is the best attitude towards our practice and our teachings. We should keep an open eye to notice this type of violence and keep it to a minimum.

Kindness must also be taught in our yoga classes. We must respect each student’s limitations, both physical and emotional. We must guide and accompany the willing students so they will find the love and peace that they have come to seek. We have to facilitate the physical practice so their minds can turn to the calm within without worrying about discomfort or not being good enough. We, as teachers, must find the balance to guide without imposing, to suggest without commanding. We must provided a nurturing atmosphere and help students to ask the right questions.

## The last type of violence that is presented by Patanjali is the one that is consented. In this last instance, we are neither the cause nor the affected but this does not make us innocent. Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel said: “*We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”* I agree with this citation and aim towards that goal. It is sometimes a difficult path to follow. As a member of the community it is our role to intervene, protect or report situations that are causing violence to others. This applies to extreme cases like Bikhram or Satyananda’s but also to everyday situations that make students uncomfortable. It should be mentioned that we cannot stop violence with violence; therefore we have to find a way to replace it with peace. It is the only way to break this vicious circle.

##  In conclusion, kindness seems like it’s the best option to reduce violence from our everyday lives. We must practice and teach with love and acceptance. And just like a mindfulness meditation practice, if you find yourself straying, notice it, and find kindness again.