

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.

II.34

वितर्करिहंसादयः कृत्तकारिता नुमोदता लोभकोधमोहपूर्वका मृदुमधिधमाता दुःखाजानाननफला इति पितपकभावनम्

(I vitarkā-himsā-ādayaḥ-kṛta-kārita-anumoditāḥ-lobha-krodha-moha-pūrvakāḥ mṛdumadhya-adhimātrāḥ duḥkha-ajñāna-ananta-phalāḥ iti pratipakṣa-bhāvanam)

**Negative deliberation such as harming and the rest;
may be done, brought about, or by approval;
is preceded by greed, anger or delusion;
may be mild, moderate or excessive;
its endless fruits are suffering and ignorance;
thus cultivate the opposite side.**

This sutra talks about how deliberate use of unkind thoughts, words and acts result in suffering. Not only for the victim, but also for the victimizer. Ill intent stems from negative emotions which are consuming and inhibit growth and well being. By acting out these feelings and emotions into other aspects of life, we can only do more harm than good. We must cultivate the opposite: kind thoughts, words and actions.

This sutra can be applied in many areas of my life. For example, in my daily interactions with people I find difficult, instead of reacting with annoyance or anger, I can choose to have patience and compassion which is most constructive and helpful in such situations.

When it comes to myself, I think this sutra perfectly addresses the issue of negative self talk and self sabotage. In our day and age we are taught to always be better and fix what is "wrong" with us. This sutra invites us to have compassion for ourselves and others and to plant and nurture seeds of love and positivity. Whenever I notice negative thoughts or desires, I can choose to ignore them and intentionally foster better, more positive thoughts which will turn into positive words and actions.

In my yoga practice, in more recent years, I have been quite good at respecting my limits and at preventing injuries, however, there was a time when I would unnecessarily push myself because it meant that I was doing “better”. In retrospect, I can see that doing so was simply a manifestation of negative feelings I had about myself and my practice.

In my teaching, I wish to convey to my students the importance of self love and self respect. Students can sometimes compare themselves to others which can make them feel “less than”. I want to honour wherever they may be on their journey and never make it seem like where they are isn’t good. Slow and steady improvement is more interesting to me than attempted perfection.

II.35

अहिंसाप्रतिष्ठाय तत्सन्निधौ वैरत्यागः

(ahimsā-pratiṣṭhāyām tat-sannidhau vaira-tyāgaḥ)

In the presence of that established in non-harming, animosity is forsaken.

This sutra is about non-harming, the concept of not inflicting any kind of physical, psychological or emotional harm to anyone. I consider this sutra one of the most important teachings in my life. Not harming others is the most basic expression of living a good yogic life. To me this sutra is closely related to The Golden Rule: the principle of treating others as one's self would wish to be treated.

The biggest change I’ve done in order to align my actions with this truth is to eat an exclusively vegan diet. I believe that this sutra also implies the non-harming of animals and all sentient beings, therefore I choose to abstain from consuming any animal products. Similarly, I make efforts to reduce my footprint on the earth like using as least plastic as possible, recycling, composting, using my bicycle more often and eating locally sourced food. I believe that all these things make a difference and are a part of Ahimsa. I wish to respect Life in all of its forms.

My life philosophy is that as long as I am not harming anyone, I can go on my merry way. I wish to do the things that make me happy and to express to the best of my ability whatever is true for me in the present moment as long as it doesn’t harm anyone. I try to be aware of the consequences of my actions and strive to make better decisions accordingly.

I wish for my teaching to always be based in goodness and benevolence. I also want to acknowledge the importance of being aware of the power a title such as “Yoga Instructor” can give someone and I see the responsibility that comes with it. Honoring Ahimsa as a yoga teacher to me involves having a clear scope of practice that is respected in order to have integrity and to ensure that advice or hands on adjustments that are outside of the teacher’s professional qualifications not be given (with the understanding that doing so could possibly harm an individual).