**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.**

In reading 11.34 and 11.35, what I took away most clearly was non-violence – toward ourselves and toward others. This related so clearly to me, especially as it relates to my yoga practice.

About 4 years ago, I injured my back from an overuse injury, and specifically in a yoga class. At the time, I had recently undergone a break-up from a 6 year relationship and in trying to deal with it, I needed to stay busy and physically active. I would run almost every day, rock climb, swim and do power yoga. In my head, as long as I was pushing myself physically, I would look and feel great to be able to find another suitable partner! This was definitely the wrong approach to take as it was anything but “non-violence”. My body was telling me to slow down, to stop, to take some time, listen to myself and be still. Instead, I was pushing it to a point that led to my back injury and subsequently meant I could not practice yoga, let alone walk, for about one year. I have realized now that I was acting in a way that the yoga sutras cautions against. I was comparing myself to others and I was negative toward myself and my body image. To me, if I was able to push my body in my yoga practice, I would continue to strive toward this ideal body image and see that I was more advanced in my practice than others.

To practice in a non-violent way means that I accept my body for its own uniqueness and I accept what I can or cannot do in a particular practice – each day is different. It also means that I do not judge others – whether it be the other students in the class or even the teacher. This can be particularly difficult for me on days where I feel I can’t hold my balance very well and I feel frustrated that I can’t do a certain pose, or when a teacher is leading a practice that is not what I expected or wanted for that day. I must remind myself that my practice is as much for my own inner peace as it is a physical practice. In order to create harmony in the community I live in, I must first be at peace within myself.

Through my injury, I have learned that in listening to my body and practicing in a more sustainable way, I can actually learn more about myself through this practice and realize the gifts it has to offer that extend beyond the physical asanas.

This same concept of non-violence applies when I will be teaching a class. If the students feel I am not at peace within myself, how can I try to create a peaceful environment in which they practice? Having gone through a physical injury like the one I had, I appreciate more and more the difference and uniqueness in every body. Therefore, with a class of 20 or 30 people, it will be important to respect each person’s practice and ensure it is encouraged that they listen to their bodies and do not push themselves beyond a limit that they are comfortable. In this sense, it will be important to stress this at the beginning of the class and to offer variations to certain postures. This will allow everyone to participate, and gives them the choice of what variation suits their bodies best on any given day.

Beyond the mat, it is important to recognize this teaching of the yoga sutras in life and with other people with which I interact. It is very easy to get into a negative mindset after a tough day at work or even after hearing gossip from a friend. To truly live in this non-violent way, I need to remove my judgment of others. I have noticed this recently in a work context as I have a difficult colleague. The more that I harbored resentment for this person, and the more this person felt the awkwardness in our exchange, the less we were able to work effectively together. A tool for me in removing judgment is empathy. How I can understand exactly where this person is coming from, such that I don’t judge them for their actions? Removing these negative thoughts, anger and judgment can improve the harmony of my relationship with this difficult colleague, and with all others in my community. If I am comfortable and content with myself at any given moment, it will be contagious. This can mean that others can draw from my positive, non-violent energy in the relationship I have with them, as well as their other relationships.

The Yoga Sutras, and particularly the “ahimsa” teaching of non-violence, is particularly powerful to me. I have realized not only the impact it can have on my physical practice, but also how it can impact my life and my relationships. I have reflected on the people I have in my life – the more positive in energy and the more negative in energy. The teaching that “ahimsa” brings peace from others is absolutely true – the more I surround myself with truly non-violent and accepting people, the more I am inclined to think and act in this same way. However, it is also a reflection that I can be this source of non-violence in all of my relationships to have this greater impact on the overall community around me.