

**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.**

The Sutra 34 and 35 of chapter II address the first of the Yamas, Ahimsa (non-violence). Ahimsa refers not only to physical violence, but also to the violence of words or thoughts. What we think about ourselves or others can be as powerful as any physical attempt to harm.

Sutra II.34 (vitarkā himsādayaḥ kṛta-kārita-anumoditā lobha-krodha-moha-āpūrvakā mṛdu-madhyā adhimātrā duḥkha-ajñāna-ananta-phalā iti pratiprakṣa-bhāvanam) has been translated as: “Negative thoughts are violence. They may be personally performed, performed on one's behalf by another, or authorized by oneself; the y may be triggered by greed, anger, or delusion; and they may be slight, moderate or extreme in intensity. One should cultivate counteracting thoughts, namely, that the end results of negative thoughts are ongoing suffering and ignorance.”

Sūtra II.35 (ahimsā-pratiṣṭhāyām tat-sannidhau vairatyāgaḥ) has been translated as: “In the presence of one who is established in nonviolence, enmity is abandoned”

Sutra II.34 focus on negative thoughts as a type of violence performed by oneself, got done by another or simply approved. According to Patanjali, negative thoughts are caused by anger, greed or self-interest. Whether the negative thoughts are present in mild, medium or intense degree, they bring pain. Interestingly, Patanjali suggests a method to counterbalance negative thoughts, the method of thinking the contrary. Additionally, as addressed in sutra II.35, if we consistently cultivate the opposite nonviolent thoughts and emotions, we create an atmosphere in which hostility ceases.

I believe it is within our human nature the tendency of having negative thoughts and emotions such as anger and greed. However we can cultivate our ability of observing our thoughts and emotions, whether they are positive and useful to our life at the present moment, or they are negative and deleterious to us or others. Once recognized, we can make a decision: instead of ignoring or shouting the negative thoughts and emotions down, we can instead decide to acknowledge their existence, integrate them within ourselves and eventually transform them into positive thinking towards yourself and others. As suggested by Patanjali, counteracting negative thoughts, will decrease their intensity and bring to an end suffering and ignorance.

This can be applied to our daily life, every time we deal with a difficult person or a challenging situation which create negative thoughts or emotions within us. To practice ahimsa means to observe ourselves in interaction with others and to notice our thoughts, actions and emotions. For instance we can observe ourselves interacting with people around us (ie. family's member, coworkers etc.) and notice what happens in a challenging situation: do we get any emotional (eg. anger, frustration, anxiety) or physical (tension, breathing difficulties etc.) reaction? do we create negative thoughts (eg. judgement) towards ourselves or others? are our actions, words, and thoughts disconnected from our inner self, from our true values? do our actions or thoughts create suffering to ourselves or others? We should practice visualizing the opposite of our first, instinctual reaction; seeing things from a different point of view will help us to weigh the potential consequences and take a better decision for ourselves and others. We should remind ourselves that causing harm to others will ultimately cause suffering for ourselves. Indeed ahimsa also means non-violence towards ourselves: we should observe if we are too harsh on ourselves and focus on positive thoughts such as empathy and non-judgment.

As a yoga practitioner and yoga teacher I believe it is our responsibility to practice ahimsa while practicing or teaching yoga; indeed yoga should be safe for all students, regardless of physical condition, level of experience, or reasons for being interested in yoga. We should be protecting ourselves and others from harmful behavior, and also taking responsibility for our own harmful behavior and attempt to stop the harm caused

by others. For instance, while practicing or teaching yoga we should always encourage ourselves and our students to listen to our own body instead of our ego, that part of us that is always comparing and competing, causing us to harm others and ourselves. This will prevent harm such as injuries. However, the concept of non-violence can be very subjective, depending on the personal and individual belief of the student. For instance the physical touch during an assisting could be much appreciated by a student but could be felt as an intrusion (ie. violent) by another student.

Overall, I believe once we express non-violence (for instance by not being judgmental) this attitude will also be felt by people around us, thus it may propagate to others. Non-violence is therefore an active behavior which may sustain positive changes around us. Practicing non-violence means showing kindness, patience, and compassion to ourselves and others.