**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.**

*2.34 Actions arising out of such negative thoughts are performed directly by oneself, caused to be done through others, or approved of when done by others. All of these may be preceded by, or performed through anger, greed or delusion, and can be mild, moderate or intense in nature. To remind oneself that these negative thoughts and actions are the causes of unending misery and ignorance is the contrary thought, or principle in the opposite direction that was recommended in the previous sutra.*

This Sutra is the culmination of the enumeration of the yamas and niyamas, and as such, the negative thoughts and actions evoked are those that deviate from the ethical principles set out in the yamas and niyamas. Harming others will result in infinite misery: an unending karmic cycle of suffering. Sutra 2.34 urges us to acknowledge, to fully see, the existence of this cycle so that we can then move to disrupt the cycle. If we live in ignorance of the cycle we will only perpetuate the cycle, rendering our mind increasingly cloudy and hindering the realisation of the true self.. Thus, by recognizing our ignorance we can move away from it; this is the practice of yoga. Once the harmful actions or thoughts are seen, we are to move in the opposite direction, away from the entrapment of the negative: from anger to non-anger; from hate to non-hate. Importantly, the Sutra discusses thoughts and actions in equal terms. Engaging in a negative thought is not less harmful than a negative action. This is because thoughts create action. Negative thoughts and actions set the foundation for future suffering.

SwamiJ explains that the Sutra outlines 27 modes of negativity. This is because it describes 3 possible agents (the self, another who is recruited by the self, or the self who approves another’s actions), 3 mental states (anger, greed, delusion), and 3 possible intensities (mild, moderate, intense). These triads may be combined in varying ways: 3 x 3 x 3 = 27. Looking at the different doers and understanding that even “mild” or minor harms perpetuate the cycle clarifies the extent of our responsibility in the propagation of negativity, so that we cannot hide behind petty justifications, such as: I didn’t do it, I was only a witness to it; it was just a white lie. The mental states correspond to the kleshas (dispositions): anger / aversion dvesha; greed / attraction / raga. Each person has a dominant disposition and being aware of that disposition can help us to identify when we are acting from that disposition in a harmful way. Moreover, by reminding us of the kleshas here we are encouraged to be vigilant for those moments when we are motivated by a non-dominant disposition. Reminding ourselves of these facts, or being always mindful, helps to purify the mind.

*2.35 As a Yogi becomes firmly grounded in non-injury (ahimsa), other people who come near will naturally lose any feelings of hostility.*

Here is it important to remember that ahimsa, non-injury or non-violence, is part of the same ethics of moving in opposition as evoked in Sutra 2.34. The opposite of injury is non-injury, not love or compassion. The practice may eventually lead in that direction but the initial step, which is being advocated in these sutras, is the cessation of harmful activity. The sutra likewise evokes the idea of cyclical action, but whereas Sutra 2.34 outlined the perpetuation of negative thoughts and actions, Sutra 2.35 informs us that our thoughts and actions of non-harm will perpetuate a wholesome cycle of non-harmful thoughts and actions. Everything we do, say, or think, no matter how “mild”, will inevitably produce consequences.

As our thoughts and behaviours have a direct impact on the individuals who surround us, these Sutras highlight the interconnectedness of all beings. They encourage us to recognize the meaningfulness of our lives: the positive and negative impacts we may have on our communities, broadly understood. They evoke the wholesomeness that we will derive from surrounding ourselves with like-minded individuals.

The principle of moving in opposition ensures that acting in accordance with the Sutras is manageable: moving directly from hate to love is an impossible task, whereas moving from hate to non-hate is difficult but feasible. It is much easier to let go of the negative and then, eventually, to move towards a more positive emotion: ie. from hate to non-hate to love.

The movement through ignorance to knowledge to altered comportament likewise renders the ethics of the Sutra more easily applicable to life. We are not being told to change our mode of being immediately. Rather, a process or a practice, is outlined. Thus when we see that our actions, speech, or thought are motivated by anger, greed, or delusion we can remind ourselves that these thoughts are harmful, moving us in an undesirable direction, and will result in perpetual suffering. In both formal and informal practice, when such thoughts occur we can simply remind ourselves of the dharma with simple phrases, such as: "This is not useful. This is only going to bring suffering. Not now.”

The allusion to the kleshas is likewise helpful as recognition of one’s disposition can lead to greater self-knowledge and assist us to more quickly realise when we engage in harmful thoughts or actions.

The yamas and the niyamas, evoked by these Sutras, are clear and concrete entry points into the ethics of yoga and can be useful to engage students in discussions of yoga philosophy without risking alienating them with more esoteric topics.