

## Essay Question:

Read Lines II.34 and II.35 from chapter two of the Yoga Sutra's of Patanjali.

### 1. The meaning of these sutras

To correctly summarize and explain how these two sutra lines can be used in my life, practice and teaching they have to be contextualized within the context of the purpose of Chapter II and the Yoga Sutras overall.

To contextualize, **Chapter II of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras**, in short, provides instructions for my practice towards **samadhi**, defined as "the return of the mind into original silence or its original nature of non-separation. Expanding this awareness out into the world" according to my by you provided online reading.

*II.2* states the obstacles on this spiritual path: lack of insight, identification with the mutable ( non reality of things), belief that (un)happiness rely on outside circumstances ( me being a victim), anxiety.

*II.12* tells me that these obstacles influence my actions and the consequences that follow these same actions

*II.15* reinforces that impressions, desires, misconceptions and conflict leads to suffering.

*II.11* tells me that meditation ( time out to reflect) can help me bring me back to my inner happiness/real needs, as source for actions/reaction.

These sutras hence, and others not specified, tells me what stance to hold to achieve happiness/ avoid suffering. They responsabilize me. Not only am I master of my happiness, I am also an agent taking actions ( both instigator and in reaction to) leading to consequences and reactions.

*II.29* outlines an eightfold path to overcome the obstacles outlined in *II.2*. Among these I find respect for others and myself ( yama and niyama). *II.30* states that non-violence is part of yama.

*II.32* teach me that contentment, self-discipline, learning from myself and accepting my fate are part of niyama. Again, I have responsibility, on my path towards **samadhi**, for how I am with others and how I am with myself ( clarity, contentment, self-study/understanding, cultivation of awareness).

*II.34* indicates that violence induced or continued by me will make both me and others suffer.

**II.34** tells me that violent thoughts/actions/sayings are based on ignorance/lack of true knowledge/ understanding. Hence, also lack of understanding of how not to suffer myself. I cannot truly feel good if I am mean to other or try to advance on their expense.

**II.34** tells me that violence feeds violence - it is a vicious circle. Hence, not only will I suffer from my violent thoughts/actions/sayings, but I might also suffer from the consequences and following retaliation.

**II.34** makes me responsible ; tells me to promote non-violent actions and solutions ( *based on understanding - hence asking me to make an effort of understanding/learning to understand myself and others*) and also “in sorts” to stop violence/act against violence. The latter is not directly underlined in the sutra, but can be inferred, by the reference to roles in **II.34** and by the fact that **II.34** says that it can be helpful to “orient yourself towards the reverse”.

As for the roles, I am responsible as it makes no difference what role I take : if I am the initiator, the person executing/verbalizing/thinking violence or the person ordering/motivating/forcing/exerting (peer) pressure on others to act/verbalize/think violence.

I am responsible for violent thoughts/acts/sayings of all scale. I presume that this underlines that a person cannot not measure the extent to which something makes people suffer “a little” or “a lot”, i.e. that suffering is subjective; a slippery slope ( what is the limit between “little’ and a “little more” ?) ; is not to be used as an excuse ( “it was not that mean”) and again risks setting off a vicious spiral of retaliation and suffering.

Here, I also refer to **II.31** that teaches me that respect for everybody, independent on social status, place, time and circumstance is a virtue.

**II.34** says I should not either hide behind any “motivation”. I suffer and induce suffering whether my violence stems from rage/**anger** ( and respond by screaming at my child that he is stupid or respond by pulling the hair of my child as my mother used to do but that is not legal anymore), **greed** ( tell the woman standing next to me in the department store that the skirt she is trying on is not becoming - as I want the last size 38 ) or **delusion**. This latter broadens my responsibility furthermore to false/unenlightened ideas. As **II.20** says, only the true self sees and that if the perception is right. **II.24** tells us that we need insight. This seems to indicate that I am responsible beyond my intent and that I need to work on the other limbs of yoga ( like Pratyahara and Dharana ) as to gain insight/see things for what they really are. Everything is interrelated.

**II.34** also advises me to orient myself towards the reverse, hence, kindness in thought, verbal expression and action. In sorts, a vicious circle of violence and of suffering on my part and on the

part of others can be reversed into a virtuous circle of kindness and non-suffering/happiness. This obviously brings us to **II.35**

**II.35** teaches, exactly that a vicious circle of violence and of suffering on my part and on the part of others can be reversed into a virtuous circle of kindness and non-suffering/happiness.

**II.35** indicates that this is a process. It indicates that all hostility disappears once it is durable, hence that it is blur of virtuous and vicious circles where the virtuous can prevail. It is hence fragile and needs to be nurtured. In fact, a person with deep rooted kindness can influence those around and lead them to give up hostility and hence also become kind.

As for impact, **II.35** rightly indicates an area of application, an environ. I hence have a for action, my spaces, the spaces/groups of people with whom I interact.

### **How these sutras can be used in my life, with people I find difficult, in my practice and in teaching my students**

#### **a. use in my life**

I started practicing yoga actively in 2012, at the age of 50.

Yoga has had a major impact in my life. However, yoga was immediately appealing for me as its value system supports ideas I already supported - like non-violence - and that probably stem both from my Scandinavian protestant upbringing, scholastic and personal readings in philosophy and life experience.

Hence, as a *child* I read "Bamse" ( a comic book) that promotes non-violence and in which the initially mean wolf eventually becomes a nice citizen working for the good of the community, thanks to Bamse, a good hearted bear that eats magical honey to become strong enough to help people in trouble, and his friends.

As a *teen* I read the philosophy of Kant, that among others tells only to do to others what you want others to do to yourself.

In life, I have been in situations where kindness and signaling that I understand the situation of the person in front of me have 1) facilitated the situation at hand or 2) improved my relationship with the person. To say that I have changed people would, however, be presumptuous and "delusional".

Anyways, I did notice when I moved to France many years ago that the person in the bakery store became so much nicer and helpful when I - despite her brushing me away initially - insisted on smiling at her, greeting politely and then also inquiring about the health of her family, making her

understand that she was not only a dispensing machine of bread, but a real person that I relate to and whose produce I like. I did notice that the person at the post office became so much more friendly when I pointed out that I understood her workload. I did notice the same at the town hall where I went to have papers signed.

I have also noticed that I have found some persons in my family, in my social circles and at work difficult, but that this difficulty often diffused as I started to try to understand their side of things and integrate that in my thinking and actions. Very often behavior and reading of behavior is based on misunderstanding of each other. Often behavior is also linked to misunderstanding situations and lack of clear and objective information. I especially saw that when I worked as a management consultant, in change management.

The practice of yoga, notably meditation, is helping me to better understand myself and things and people around me. In a sense it has given myself the allowance to take the time and be patient. Meditation helps me to see my worries, anxieties and hurts. It helps me start questioning and understanding where they and my feelings come from.

Yoga helps me not to act on them, immediately, but to take a step back and consider feeling/doing/saying things differently. It helps me being kind, non judgmental and non violent to myself.

Yoga in the context of the discussed sutras, **II.34 and II.35**, guides me on how to manage/deal with/interact with persons and situations I would otherwise find difficult. If somebody is angry and I respond with anger, it only leads to a vicious circle of anger. If somebody is angry, things change if I say a kind word, if I try to understand why they are angry and help change their situation ( if it is in my realm) a virtuous circle could start.

#### **b. in my practice**

As stated above, Yoga in the context of the discussed sutras, helps me be non-violent, towards myself and in my interactions and responses to others.

In my practice, thinking of these sutras can motivate me, tell me what is the right path to happiness/less suffering and towards **samadhi**. However, I understand, as indicated above, that this limb cannot be achieved in isolation. It is part of the yoga path. "You are what you do, not what you say you'll do" (Carl Gustav Jung).

In my practice, to achieve the non-violence, part of how to be in the world, I have to act on how I am with myself ( clarity, contentment, patience, self-study, pass time on my self-awareness) as to overcome the obstacles ( like greed etc.). To achieve this I understand I need to meditate - work on

my inward seeing and cultivate inner perceptual awareness. To achieve this in turn, I am helped by practice of asanas and working on my breathing.

However, to be honest, I did not start yoga with samadhi in mind. It has been a path of discovery for me. As I have progressed, I have gone through different stages. It started out as a sport activity; then I realized that I gained stability/relaxed mentally; then I realized that I was able to do asanas, like backbends, without fear; meditatively observe my trains of thoughts and start to look into myself, without fear. Then I realized that I can be kind to myself. And on it goes....

Thanks to the 200 hour yoga teacher course that I am pursuing it is all coming together as I have discovered the philosophy of yoga.

### **c. teaching**

As a yoga instructor II.34 and II.35 can be used on several levels.

In the extreme, I could obviously specialize and promote these values in talks, on and offline.

On a much smaller scale, I could let these sutras guide “my image” and “behavior” in class - being a role model myself - as to create a kind ambiance in my class and yoga studio and favor behaviors that my students can take with them when they walk out of the studio, in the order of “I was met with kindness today at yoga. I feel so good. I will go home and be kind and understanding with my children. If I meet somebody in the street, I will smile just as kindly as my yoga teacher did”.

In fact, on my yoga path I have met quite a few teachers that have non-violent attitudes and behavior. It has had a very positive effect on me. When I teach I wish to have the same positive effect on others.

Obviously, being a role model in class does not really work if I am not also a role model in other groups and in society at large. It has to be genuine, not only a “selling” factor.

