

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.

When negative thoughts or acts such as violence, etc. are done, caused to be done or even approved of - whether incited by greed, anger or infatuation - whether indulged in with mild, medium or extreme intensity, they are based on ignorance and bring certain pain. Reflecting upon this is also pratipaksa bhavana.

In the presence of one firmly established in nonviolence, all hostilities cease.

Something always lies behind violence. Whether it is repressed emotions that we don't want to admit to ourselves or that we don't want to deal with, violent reactions, speech, acts are more then often caused by an underlying cause.

Patanjali tells us that violence is based on ignorance. We ignore, consciously or not, that nothing, including us, is permanent. That the world is ever changing. That we are one with others and nature. We ignore what is our true self by identifying with the frivolous and superficial parts of being human.

Ignorance brings pain. We tend to become angry, bitter, irritable towards others, ourselves, the world, if we refuse or neglect to connect to our true self. And whether the intensity of the thoughts and acts that these feelings incite is mild or extreme, the pain it will cause will rarely affect just one person. Pain can have a ripple effect and it is our duty, as yogis, as human beings, to be aware of that. To be curious when strong negative emotions arise. To learn not to identify to them. To cultivate the practice of pratipaksa bhavana; to reduce pain through actively changing, shifting a negative thought into a positive one.

Reading the 35th sutras, two things come to mind. First is: « Be the change you want to see in the world » and the second is the importance of « teaching by example ». Which more or less comes down to the same thing. If you want less violence or negative behaviors in your life, start by being peaceful yourself. Peaceful and compassionate. Towards yourself, and towards others. We are all connected. We all feel each others' energies. Kindness invites kindness.

Of course, this all takes practice and this is why we need to constantly seize every opportunity we have to cultivate a positive attitude towards even the

most difficult situation, person or challenge. To me, meditation is the first step towards that practice of pratipaksa bhavana. It helps us by bringing attention to the present moment. It creates the space we need to inquire into our thoughts, emotions, feelings. When something triggers us, we will gradually be able to take a step back and observe what has arisen before we react.

To me, a daily meditation practice is a daily reminder that cultivating peace can only be beneficial. I feel more inclined to answer calmly to aggressiveness if I'm able to isolate what I'm feeling and be curious about it instead of being immediately reactive. Some people like to provoke others, and the most efficient way to defuse this tension is by responding with kindness, patience, understanding. Nonviolence can be an extremely powerful tool to prevent an outburst.

The 34th and 35th sutras also resonate with my philosophy when it comes to my personal yoga practice. Through the years, I've learned to face challenging postures with a playful attitude. I used to get angry when I fell. When I would think « I'm not flexible enough. Strong enough. I'll never be as good as my teacher ». But accepting things as they are and being curious instead of irritated is much more motivating and valuable at the end of the day. If practice brings frustration and negative thoughts, it defeats the purpose.

As a yoga teacher, I think one of the most important lessons we can teach our students is a simple one: the power of kindness. Starting with being kind to ourselves and our body, this quality will inevitably have an effect on the people around us.

A peaceful world starts with the only thing we have control over: our own behavior. And I commit to cultivating this attitude every time I step on my mat and this is what I will first teach my students.