

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.

2.34 Negative thoughts are violence, etc. They may be [personally] performed, performed on one's behalf by another, or authorized by oneself; they may be triggered by greed, 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.

2.35 In the presence of one who is established in nonviolence, enmity is abandoned.

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras lines 34 and 35 of the second chapter offer guidance toward aspiring towards non-violence, which corresponds to 5 Yamas; Ahimsa.

The Yamas outlined by Patanjali were the moral, social and ethical guidelines to practicing yoga, and to conducting oneself in everyday life. Along with these competitive tendencies naturally bring along feelings of anger, greed, resentment, envy, jealousy and selfishness, all of which are examples of violence in thoughts.

All of these thoughts can relate back to our selfish desire to be competitive, to have more, be it food, money, fame, notoriety, material wealth, really anything that can be desired by greed. The ego also plays a role in this as well in that it has an inflated sense of pride and a desire to be superior to others. This can lead us to be judgemental toward others, act in ways to diminish or gain power over others in our bid to appear superior, and ultimately can lead to harming others with our negative behaviours. The intensity of these negative thoughts may be slight, moderate, or extreme and can be displayed in our action towards others. These can perpetuate with mental, emotional or physical violence toward others, creating harmful and injurious environments. Ultimately we need to be able to recognize

these thoughts as they arrive and strive to counteract them as the end result is not only harm upon others, but these thoughts result in ongoing suffering and ignorance for ourselves. A great example of this is how we can get really upset when we feel that someone has deliberately done something to upset us. Feelings of anger rise to the surface, perhaps we respond with an unkind word or gesture in a bid to “get even”. Our day continues and we remain upset at the situation, the person, the action and the event continues to occupy our minds with negative energy creating ongoing suffering for ourselves.

In order to counteract these negative thoughts practicing compassion for others and not reacting to a situation in a negative way, instead acting with feelings of kindness and acceptance. In the example above perhaps the person had no idea they cut you off, interrupted you, bumped in to you or created a situation that you felt angry. Accepting that it was unintentional and not meant to harm you in any way, that the event will not cause you any long term suffering and is likely completely meaningless in the grander scheme. In dealing with our hyper-competitive society understanding that more material wealth often comes with feelings of being unfulfilled. Perhaps they lead a highly stressful life and compromise their health and well being to gain more money, fame, notoriety, or material wealth, and ultimately they are not and may never be happy. To apply this in all aspects of life, we need to learn to let go of these negative thoughts and recognize when they come to the surface that they are of absolute no help to us, and instead cultivate counteracting thoughts such as compassion, mindfulness and kindness. The ability to recognize these negative thoughts are crucial to preventing us from acting on them in a violent way and harming others either intentionally or unintentionally. Encouraging students to not force their bodies beyond their capacity, stopping before they reach maximum flexion / extension, and sequencing classes that are inclusive for all levels by bringing all students through basic poses and offering increasing difficulty in the poses for more advanced students. Another way to foster a sense of non-violent thought to students and to use in their daily life would be to offer tools such as breathing before reacting or discussing showing compassion toward others either during practice, or as students hold poses.