

Pandit Rajmani Tigunait's Commentaries on Sutras 2:30 from *The Practice of the Yoga Sutra*

SUTRA 2:30

अहिंसासत्यास्तेयब्रह्मचर्यापरिग्रहा यमाः ॥३०॥

ahimsāsatyāsteyabrahmacaryāparigrahā yamāḥ || 30 ||

Non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, and non-possessiveness are the restraints.

On the surface, it appears that embracing the five restraints—non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, and non-possessiveness—helps us build a solid foundation for changing our behavior. They bring out the noble and respectable person in us. We become exemplary and are no longer a source of fear for anyone. These restraints make our life simple, leaving us with plenty of time and energy to attend to our core mission—yoga sadhana. This in itself is a great accomplishment. However, in commenting on this sutra, Vyasa takes the practice of these restraints to a much loftier height.

Vyasa states, “All the restraints and the observances are rooted in *ahimsa*—they are to be practiced to attain perfection in *ahimsa*.” He describes *ahimsa* as “non-animosity toward all living beings, all the time, and in every respect.” This concise statement can be fully understood only in the light of the description of the five afflictions in sutras 2:3–9.

Without exception, all of us are afflicted with fear. All fear culminates in fear of death, which is the epitome of loss. Fear is always accompanied by attachment, aversion, and a false sense of self-identity. It has its roots in *avidya* and receives its inspiration and nourishment from *avidya*.

Avidya is our strong attachment to what is contradicted by our intuition. We know the unimaginably vast universe existed long before we were born, and we know the force behind creation is infinitely more primordial, intelligent, and capable than we are. Yet we demand proof. That is the work of *avidya*. When we are dead, we are nothing. From this nothingness we emerge as a living being. The one who turns the dead into the living and gives us an identity is not only omnipotent but also selfless and infinitely kind. And yet we doubt the incessant flow of its love and guidance. That is the work of *avidya*. Under the influence of *avidya*, we defend our self-identity from the primordial omniscient being who breathed life into it in the first place. This *avidya*-driven urge for *self-defense* forces us to build a wall around ourselves. This is how *dvaita*, the sense of duality, is born. While living within the confines of duality we are cut off from the immortal, eternal core of our being. The immortal in us is enveloped by the experience of mortality. This is the wellspring of fear. If not checked, it continues perpetuating itself.

Fear is pervasive. We are consumed by the urge to defend ourselves and protect our existence. This urge impels us to take the offensive at the slightest provocation. All living

beings—from single-celled organisms to complex entities—are continually emitting their innate fear and filling the objective world with fearful energy. Thus we are living in a world run by fear. The more evolved a creature's intelligence, the more intense and goal-driven is the fear it emits. We humans are highly evolved, so the fear contained in us is more intense and definitive than that in many other creatures. Animals fight and hunt for obvious reasons—procreation and food, for example. We fight for these and for other, subtler reasons—including power, possessions, prestige, and fame. An animal's fear is regulated by nature, so its range of enemies is limited. Our fear is rooted in and propelled by well-crystallized avidya, which has given birth to a highly afflicted mind (Vyasa onYS 2:23). There is no limit to our desires, cravings, ambitions, and urge for self-aggrandizement. This stretches the range of our enemies to an almost limitless size.

Fully formed, fear-driven animosity is a unique characteristic of human beings. It is so subtle and potent that only a person highly endowed with the power of discernment can see its far-reaching, entangled tentacles. Animosity is more subtle than physical or verbal retaliation against a person or a group with the potential to harm us. To describe the subtle nature of fear-born animosity, Vyasa uses a precise term, *abhidroha*, which means “intense aversion that captures our mind from every direction.” It is a mental condition that engenders anger toward those we dislike. In other words, intense aversion coupled with anger is *abhidroha*, the fundamental force behind animosity.

Animosity is always preceded by a strong sense of self-identity. Anyone or anything that threatens our self-identity is our enemy—an individual, an ethnic or religious group, or an ideology contrary to our beliefs. This subtle force of animosity not only makes us shout, shoot our neighbor, and bomb other nations, it also makes us harm our most intimate friend—*buddhi sattva*, the essence of our inner intelligence. That is why Vyasa says that *ahimsa* is embracing the practice of “non-animosity toward all living beings, all the time, and in every respect.”

Vyasa affirms that the remaining four restraints are rooted in *ahimsa*. When we are not established in *ahimsa*—in other words, if we have not conquered the primitive urge of self-preservation and thus have not transcended the urge to destroy our “enemy”—we find ourselves under enormous pressure to manipulate our conscience, fabricate evidence, obstruct justice, and do everything possible to justify our intentions and deeds. We are bound to commit *himsa*, violence. This extremely subtle form of *himsa* is hidden in the deepest recesses of our mind. For untold ages, we have been using this subtle element of violence to defend ourselves and eliminate those who pose a threat to our self-identity. We perceive this as strength. Driven by our subhuman tendencies, we protect and nurture this element at any cost. Misled by this destructive urge, we lie. To hide one lie, we tell ten more. In the process we damage our conscience, hurt others, and disrupt the peace in both our inner and outer worlds.

The same tendency convinces our mind and senses to claim things that are not ours, live recklessly, and consume indiscriminately. This is how we fall from *satya*, truthfulness; engage in *steaya*, stealing; get caught up in *abrahmacharya*, sensuality; and become obsessed with *parigraha*, worldly possessions. That is why, according to Vyasa, the

remaining four restraints—truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, and non-possessiveness—are rooted in *ahimsa*, non-violence.

As stated earlier, both *ahimsa* and *himsa* are extremely subtle. To comprehend the dynamism of *ahimsa* and *himsa*, we need a highly refined and perceptive mind. Ordinary people have no capacity even to detect the element of violence at the subtle level expounded by Vyasa. Similarly, embracing the practice of nonviolence at this subtle level is beyond the scope of ordinary seekers. The phenomena of lying, stealing, excessive sense gratification, obsession with worldly possessions, and the ensuing destructive effects on us and on our society are easy to comprehend. By restraining ourselves from lying, stealing, and abusing our senses, and by minimizing our mental and worldly possessions, we are automatically embracing the principle of *ahimsa*. That is why we practice all five restraints together.

The practice of the five restraints is the foundation for a wholesome life. In spite of the differences in our spiritual, ideological, or professional orientations, we all have a common goal—living a healthy, happy, and fulfilling life. To describe how these restraints serve as the ground for achieving this common goal, Patanjali introduces the next sutra.