



# What Causes us to be Violent; The Five Kleshas ~ Sharon Gannon

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Focus: Ahimsa

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Place: Jivamukti Yoga, NY

So, our focus is ahimsa. Patanjali gives ahimsa to us as a practice. Us meaning aspiring yogis. Remember, Patanjali is not talking to normal people, he's talking to people, like all of us who believe that awakening is possible and who want to be free. That's a very important point, I think, when we look at Patanjali's Yoga Sutra and the messages and the teachings in the Sutra. These are teachings directed to those who want to be free. So, Patanjali says if you want yoga, if you want to be free enough so that you know yourself as divine, connected to the source, that's what Yoga means. Then, if you really want this, know that the realization that comes to the yogi is the realization of the oneness of being. If you want that realization then he says as long as you see others and not the one, don't hurt them. Don't cause them harm. And if you embrace that as a practice, you will attain yoga. You will be able to perceive oneness. You will have the direct experience of reality, which is the oneness of being.

So to investigate this as a yogi. I was contemplating what causes us to be violent then. Because if we are to embrace nonviolence, then we should look into the causes of violence. Patanjali gives us that clue in the very first sutra when he says, "*Atha yoga nushasanam.*" Yoga is possible if we are willing to look deeper into things. So to go to the root, the core, not to be content with surface values. Seeing things on the surface level, but to penetrate.

So I started to move into this inner journey of penetration towards the core of what could be causing violence. And I had this remembrance, this insight last night and I remembered an experiment that was being carried on in a major university during the sixties. And, you know, during the sixties a lot of experiments were going on, experiments into what causes violence because there was a war going on, the Vietnam war. And so scientists were wanting to find ways to make soldiers more violent. Because that is the job of a soldier, to kill. And so to kill you have to have violence inside of you and then that has to be able to be expressed so that extends outside of you towards the target. Right? So they were doing all kinds of experiments and investigating this in our behavior. And there was one experiment that I remember that was carried out by a major university, I'm not quite sure cause I didn't have my notes with me in the apartment, but I think it was Stanford, but I'm not sure, but it was a university of that caliber. There were similar experiments going on, but I just want to tell you about this one first. The experiment went something like this. College students were invited to participate in this experiment. If you've ever been a college student then you know this is common practice. That there's a note you know or a notice that says anybody who wants to participate, you know, you get paid for these kinds of things. People are going, yeah I know I've done that.

Okay, so, you went into this little booth and you were shown like this one button that you could push and then there was a two way mirror and on the other side of the mirror was another college student that you could see but they couldn't see you. Okay? And then you were asked some questions. Like very mundane questions. Like you know sort of like those questions that test your psychological stability. You know, like, who was the first president of the United States. You know, those kind of questions.



If you got the question right then a light went off telling you you got the question right and that meant that you could push the button. And every time you pushed the button you received some money. I mean you didn't receive the money right then but they tallied it up and that's how you were paid. And I forget how much it was, a dollar, five dollars, ten dollars. I don't know right. But here was another aspect of the experiment. When the light went off indicating that you got the questions right and you pressed the button, the person that you saw through your glass received an electrical shock. You could see them. You know, an electrical shock hurts. It doesn't kill the person, but it hurts. So you would see the other person suffering, or receiving that shock and you knew that it was because of you pushed the button that they were shocked.

Well, it was very interesting because the number of students, the percentage of the students who actually did that, went along with it, you know, even though they knew they were hurting. But they weren't really, you see. It was a set up. The student on the other side of the mirror was pretending to get the shock. They were acting and they had been rehearsed. Okay. So they were acting, so they really weren't getting shocked. But I forget what the percentage was, but it was very high, like you know ninety nine percent of the students in the experiment, you know, I got it right and.... And saw the reaction of that.

But at the end, you know, when they were questioned, "Why did you do that?" *'Well, you know, I was told to do it. I was told it was okay. It was a university sponsored event.'* Meaning, even if they felt inside that it might be wrong, their own inner heart promptings, or their conscience, or what they knew to be right inside was overridden by, like a conditioning and they were getting paid for it too, remember. They were getting paid for it. Like a soldier gets paid to kill.

Now about the same time there was other experiments that were going on in the university and other universities across this country in labs where they used animals. And this one particular experiment is very very very interesting I think. It was basically the same experiment as was carried out with the college kids but they had Rhesus monkeys. Which, quite commonly are used in university lab experiments. So there was another monkey in the cage next to it. They could see that monkey. They pushed a lever in their own cage and that lever released a pellet of food for them, so they were getting paid in food. But they saw that every time they pressed the lever, they got the pellet, but it also administered a shock to the monkey. And the monkey wasn't faking it. It was real shock. They went into a convulsion, it hurt them.

When the monkey who was able to press the lever and get the pellet of food realized, and they realized it pretty quickly, like after one of two pellets they realized that yeah they were getting paid but it was at the expense of hurting someone else, they wouldn't do it. They wouldn't do it. In fact many of the monkeys (and of course the scientists wanted to see how far would they go) a couple of the monkeys they let go to starvation level. And some of them even died. They would die rather than hurt, and the other monkey that they saw was not related to them.

*(David: I think they were even a different species.)*



They tried different species too, they did do that. They did this experiment in many different ways. First they did it with the same species of monkey, then they did it with a different species. Now, we pride ourselves thinking we're so intelligent, you know. And here are monkeys who never went to a yoga class, never read Patanjali, never even went to a Sunday school, or a community civics class.

*(Student: Not in this life.)*

Right. Not in this life. Thank you.

Well, there was another experiment that a want to site, and it's an experiment that actually some of you who have taken the Jivamukti teacher training course, you meet the scientist who has really developed this experimental procedure because he's in the movie *The Animals' Film*. And, anyway, this was also about aggression and violence. And the experiments were about causing pain, like administering a shock, a very painful shock which would then cause the test subject to lash out and hurt the nearest whoever was there. You know hit them, bite them. Right? And so you know this is, these are very cruel experiments to begin with. But I think that we shouldn't dismiss them all together and to actually try to, to at least learn something positive and to move all of us in a positive direction.

The monkeys who were subject to these experiments that were supposed to prove that pain produces violence in someone, that, yes they would, if there was somebody nearby they would bite them or scratch them. But not always. They started to like bite themselves instead, instead of lashing out. Very interesting.

I want to read from a book called *Shantaram*. Has anyone read this book yet? Please raise your hand. Oh, I'm the only one in this room? Read this book. I mean, I suggest you read this book. It's by Gregory David Roberts. It's a new book. It just came out. It's written by an Australian man. It's taken from his own experience. He was in a prison, a maximum security prison in Australia. In fact he was the only person that ever escaped that, it's called Victoria prison in Australia. Anyway I'm just going to read to you the first paragraph of the first chapter:

*"It took me a long time and most of the world to learn what I know about love and faith and the choices we make. But the heart of it came to me in an instant where I was chained to a wall and being tortured. I realized somehow through the screaming in my mind that even in that shackled, bloody helplessness I was still free. Free to hate the men who were torturing me or free to forgive them. It doesn't sound like much I know. But in the flinch and bite of the chain, when it's all you've got, that freedom in a universe of possibility. And the choice you make between hating and forgiving can become the story of your life."*

Shantaram means man of peace.

Now everything that we have ever done in this life, in countless lives, if it's Karma, actions that have been unresolved. Meaning, you know to resolve an action means to take it back to its source and all actions have the same origin. Love. So if there are actions like anger, jealousy, cruelty, any kind of violence, you know. That's gonna be an unresolved action and it's gonna linger in our psyche in the cells and tissues of our physicality, in our hearts right? Because we're not letting it go back to where all things come from.



We're not letting it become redeemed in the heart of universal love. So it kind of sticks with us and it can motivate our future actions. But, if we can be large enough to forgive, and to forgive ourselves because there's so much despising, you know, in our culture, there's so much despising of our own bodies, of our own personalities. We beat ourselves up a lot. We feel guilty, you know, this regret that kind of eats us away. But to understand that whatever we've done in our past, the time that we did it, it was the best we could do. At that time. Maybe in hindsight you know, you gain some wisdom and you look back, you go, "*I could have done better, why did I do that?*" No, you couldn't have done better, none of us could have. At the time that we did the action, it was the best we could do.

So, knowing that, we can forgive ourselves. We can forgive others. When they do things which appear to us as hideous, if we know that they can't really do anything else at that time, that's the best they can do, then we can forgive as we will be able to forgive ourselves. So, when we are brave enough, and it takes tremendous bravery to put yourselves in potentially difficult positions, like Pinchu Mayurasana, Trikonasana, Virabhadrasana I, Paschimottanasana, in all of these asanas are designed to allow us to reflect on our own actions, because those asanas reveal to us in an energetic way, in a very physical way, where our Karmas unresolved, where we're still holding on. Holding on to that anger, holding on to that self-condemnation, holding on to that guilt, holding on to that sadness. Not able to let go into joy or love.

So, if we can, at that moment in the asana not do what our cultural conditioning has conditioned us to do, which is to run away. If something doesn't feel good, right, you move... like in meditation, if a burning starts to happen in your hip or your knee you run away from it, you don't go into it with love or forgiveness or embrace it or try to ease it or comfort it. Our tendency, in our, because of our cultural conditioning is to run away from it.

So, when I was looking for these causes of violence, Patanjali says, the obstacles to yoga, the kleshas, and those kleshas are...? Do we know them? What's the first one? Avidya. And then, asmita, then raga, dvesa, abhinivesha. So the first obstacle is avidya, meaning forgetting that you are a radiant divine being, that's your true nature and thinking that you are, you know, a small, insignificant personality -- body/mind personality. Right? That's avidya. From avidya all the other kleshas come.

The next one is asmita, which means attachment to ego. So, like the college students, you know, they were in that state of asmita. They were like, "*But it's good for me. I'm getting paid for it.*" You know? So if it's good for me then who cares about if it's bad for somebody else. It's good for me. So that's the rationale that occurs that would enable somebody to hurt somebody else and that is coming from asmita, which is coming from avidya. Because you wouldn't even think of yourself as just I, personality, you know, I need what I need for my existence, unless you had forgotten you were the divine self. Right?

And then, of course, we can quickly go through the raga and dvesa. Like hankering after things that feel good, you know, comfortable, pleasurable. And running away from things that are not pleasurable.

And then, of course, abhinivesha is fear of death.



So, violence comes out of those kleshas. So, if we can see that, embrace that, even just intellectually it's huge, because it will give us the means to be free. Because then when we feel these kleshas arising in our yoga practice, specifically in our asana practice because the asana reveals to us our relationship with all beings. They're right there available to us, they've been filed away you know in our shoulders, in our lower back, in our knee. They're there.

So, if we can see that in a new light, knowing that these difficulties that we are feeling have arisen through these obstacles, which the main obstacle is coming from not knowing you are the divine self. Then we will have a motivation for transcending those difficulties. We will have a motivation for practicing meditation. We will have a motivation for eating a vegetarian diet. We will have a motivation for being kind to our parents. We will have a motivation for not gossiping or not using curse words or you know. We will know why we will know how it all fits and how it all can contribute to our liberation, to our ultimate happiness and revealment of who we are. Yeah?

So it's good to be a radical. Yogi's are radicals by nature. Meaning they like to go to the root. You know, radical comes from the same root as radish and a radish is a root. So a radical is somebody who enjoys digging to the root of something. Right? Not living on the surface, but trying to understand it from it's core. Okay. Yes.

Okay, we have something to work on now. Let's go back to our mat space.

