

The “H” Word

✘ We use a word today, a great word, a word that didn't exist back in the day, especially in the way we use it now. That word? Hater. Yeah, a hater is someone who is often contrary not only to you and what you're about but more often than not, chronically grumpy about the world. For a hater, there is an unlimited supply of things to complain about, gripe about, or criticize. They see the world through hater-colored glasses. You know anybody like this? Worse, do you ever find yourself resembling a hater? Reminds me of those two dudes in The Muppet Show who sit up in peanut gallery and spit out insults and complaints like it were an art form?

Well, having a hating attitude can be terminal. It can be an insidious habit that will canker your heart. And if you're not a hater, than chances are that you know one, right? We all know someone who we like, maybe even love, but who can be so chronically cantankerous that we find ourselves limiting our exposure to them.

The Yoga Sutras talk about haters. Maybe not directly but if you read between the lines you can see it in there. Specifically, the sutras talk about the opposite quality of a hater. The term is Samtosha and refers to the spiritual practice of contentment and seeing the world as abundant and perfect in its imperfections. Samtosha means to decide to be content with what you have and see the world through gratitude-colored glasses, to choose to be cool with what life has thrown you. Sure, we will always hope and strive for a bright future, but along the way we can decide that we are happy with this, now. It's about presence. Samtosha is a spiritual practice and belongs in yoga philosophy because it will fundamentally change the way you see the world in a way that helps you feel a part of the incredibly beautiful and complex family of all human beings instead of fighting against it.

We can practice Samtosha on the mat. For one, we can practice being content with where we are at in our practice, always riding that comfortably intense edge, rather than pushing beyond our limits. Then, as we honor our bodies, it will be our bodies that invite us to move further in a pose. And secondly, I love the idea that this incredible life journey called yoga can be done on nothing more than a 2'X6' rubber mat, and that's all the space we need! Yes, the world is our practice space, but our yoga mat represents all the space we need as we join with like-minded people in a yoga class to apply the condensed practice of learning principles like poses and Samtosha in order to bring those qualities into our practice of daily living.

I'd like to offer two practices that will change your life. I know it sounds like I'm over selling this, but I'm not. Hang with me.

Practice 1.


Before chronically judging people, practice seeing something good about everyone you see. Let it be the first thing you notice. Over the weekend, I was at the mall and did this practice as I watched throngs of people for an amazing result in my own heart. "That guy has a cool hat. That woman looks like she really loves her kids. Blue is a great color for her. That guy drives an energy efficient car—thanks for doing your part to help keep our environment clean," etc. I felt as a part of an incredible family. You can do this practice at stop lights, while walking down the street, and especially while in a crowd. Practice doing it with your own family members. Watch to see how your entire demeanor changes and also how others change toward you.

Practice 2

I've begun using a life-changing mantra: "I don't need to have an opinion about that." You can ask my wife, sometimes I'll

start to go off about the smallest things, like the wording on a billboard or the fact that Mini's aren't mini anymore, but rather medium-i. I sometimes get negative too. Then, I might stop myself and say, "I don't need to have an opinion about that. Why can't there be a Medium-I?" "That billboard can be exactly the way it is (illegible) and I simply just don't need to have an opinion about it." I bet my wife enjoys me more when I'm not so opinionated about everything. Heaven forbid that I become that chronically cantankerous person in her life, right? Try out this mantra. Maybe offer it to the grump in your life.

Practice Samtosha this week both on and off the mat. And if you don't make it to class, "nor your or I need to have an opinion about that."

Scott Moore is a senior teacher of yoga and mindfulness in  New York City, and when he's not teaching or conducting retreats, he writes for Conscious Life News, Elephant Journal, Mantra Magazine, and his own blog at scottmooreyoga.com. Scott also loves to trail run, play the saxophone, and travel with his wife and son.