

Ep #229: Alcohol as a Teacher



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 229.

Whether you want to drink less or stop drinking, this podcast will help you change the habit from the inside out. We're challenging conventional wisdom about why people drink and why it can be hard to resist temptation. No labels, no judgment, just practical tools to take control of your desire and stop worrying about your drinking. Now, here's your host Rachel Hart.

Welcome back everyone. We are talking today about alcohol as your teacher. It's the idea that every time you reach for a drink, every time you drink more than you want, there is something for you to learn. Alcohol and the habit are trying to teach you something.

And if you think that what I'm about to say is that alcohol is trying to teach you that it's bad for you, or that you can't handle it, or that you can't control yourself, then you are probably new to this podcast. Because that's not what we talk about here.

Alcohol can be a teacher for you in the best way possible. It can teach you about your relationship with yourself and other people and your emotions, both positive and negative. It can teach you about your inhibitions and your body and your relationship to time and stress and work and fun and relaxation.

It can teach it all to you. And I want that for you, but you have to be willing to drop some of your assumptions. So I found this definition when I was preparing for the podcast about what a teacher is. And the definition said that a teacher is someone or something that helps you acquire knowledge, which I like, but I think we need to make a little caveat to that.

Because teachers bring knowledge into your life that helps you expand and grow and evolve. So a teacher really is someone not just who helps you

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acquire knowledge, but knowledge that helps you up-level, helps you get to that next level in your development.

Because we're always evolving, we're always growing, at least that's what I believe. So if you think that the lesson that you're getting from a teacher is, "I don't know, you're pretty irresponsible, I don't know, I think you might be broken, I think there might be something wrong with you," I will tell you that that is not a teacher.

Because that knowledge is never going to lead to growing and evolving. We know this because we know how the think-feel-act cycle works, which I talk about all the time here. How you feel, what you do, it doesn't just happen. It's created by what happens in your mind.

The thoughts that you think lead to how you feel, which determines how you show up in life. So any kind of teaching that says you're kind of broken or irresponsible or not really good enough or there's something wrong with you, those thoughts are only ever going to create shame and hopelessness.

And I promise you that those emotions will only ever lead to hiding and self-sabotage and giving up. And those actions are the opposite of growth. In my mind, a teacher doesn't have to be a person. Nature can be a teacher. Grief can be a teacher. And alcohol can be a teacher.

But not as a scold. Not as a way to remind you how awful you felt the next day after drinking too much. This is where people get seriously confused when they think what I'm saying is oh, you should learn your lesson, you should have learned your lesson about drinking too much.

I will tell you, this idea that we should learn our lesson about drinking too much and learn our lesson about alcohol, nine times out of 10, it's really just a cover for beating yourself up, for having thoughts like, "Okay, I guess alcohol and how much I drank last night taught me that I'm just an all or

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nothing person, everything is black and white for me, either I can drink and when I drink I drink too much, or I can't drink at all, that I can't say no, or I'm not good at following my commitments, or that I have an addictive personality, or that my brain is different from everyone else's because I can't drink like a normal person."

If that's what you think I'm talking about, if that's what you think is the lesson that you need to learn, I will just tell you, you are completely wrong. I'm not talking about that. No teacher worth their salt has ever made a difference by teaching someone that they're broken, or that something is wrong with them, or that they aren't capable of change.

Teachers don't teach us that. They show us the opposite. They show us what we're capable of. They reveal something that otherwise would be kind of difficult to see. And that can happen with alcohol. That can happen with the glass of wine or the beer or the cocktail that you're reaching for. It can happen with how much you drank last night.

And I just want you to - if you're feeling resistant at all to this idea, I just want you to kind of try it on. What would happen if you approached alcohol as your teacher? And this is not a teacher who is about scolding you and telling you that you're irresponsible.

What if it was a teacher that was here to help you? Here to help you grow? It wasn't here to point out your faults or your flaws. What then? I really want you to think about it this way. If alcohol is your teacher, which I really believe that it can be for everyone, then what are you learning about how much you drank last night or last week or last month or last year?

Remember, it can't be that something's wrong with you, it can't be that you did it wrong. It's not to scold you. Teachers are here to help us acquire knowledge so that we can expand and grow and evolve to our next level.

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So the answer cannot be alcohol taught me that I have an addictive personality, or alcohol taught me that something's wrong with my brain, or that I have too much desire, or that I just can't say no to my urges. That's not it.

I really do want you all to try this on, and I will tell you that if it feels hard to wrap your brain around this concept, that's a good thing. I want this to challenge you. If something doesn't challenge you, it cannot change you. Because our habits are run on our default programming. The thoughts that we think over and over again. And the only way to change a habit is not by changing the action. It's by going to the source. It's by changing the thought.

So you have to start to challenge your default thinking. You have to start asking questions that feel a little uncomfortable and feel like I don't know, I can't really wrap my brain around that. That's how you create change.

So wrestle with this idea, and don't just do it in your head. Wrestle with the idea on paper of how is alcohol your teacher. Spend some time writing. What is it teaching you? What is drinking more than you want teaching you? What is your desire teaching you? What are your urges teaching you?

If you had to challenge yourself to answer the question, how is it helping me grow, how is it helping me evolve, rather than just using how much you drank last night or last week or last month as a way to beat yourself up, what would your answer be? Are you even willing to be curious about this question or do you want to reject the entire premise?

The entire premise that alcohol and your drinking habits could have something to offer you. Drinking and drinking too much and having a hard time saying no and wrestling with your urges, it isn't happening to you. This is what I believed for a long time. I believed it was happening to me, but it was happening for me, and it's happening for you.

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And I will tell you honestly, this mind shift is what changed everything for me. I really went from feeling like, God, why is this me? Why am I the one that has to struggle with my drinking? Why can't I just drink like everyone else? Why don't I know when to call it quits? Why can't I just be a normal drinker?

I had these thoughts and beliefs from the age of 17 until I was in my early 30s. So long I wrestled with this belief that my drinking and my drinking habits and drinking too much was all happening to me. But I will tell you, when I made the shift, when I started to think, "How is this helping me?" Because it was helping me, when I dropped the story that a night of going out and getting drunk was a sign that I was a screw up and that I was never going to be able to figure this out, and that this was some huge burden in my life that was unsolvable, when I dropped all of that, then I could get curious about how I was using alcohol.

How I was using it as a reward and a sign that hey, I'm off the clock, I'm not checking email anymore. I used to drink as a way to have fun when really, I felt kind of anxious about heading out to a party or socializing or going on a first date. I used to drink as a way to lose my inhibitions around my body.

And I used it as a way to stop feeling like I can just let my hair down and I don't have to follow any rules and I don't have to be perfect because I didn't know how to do it any other way. I used to feel fancy and sophisticated, and you know what, sometimes I reached for a drink just because I wanted something to do with my hands.

I couldn't have seen any of this when I thought that the habit was happening to me. When my story was, "I don't know, I just love to drink, it just tastes good, I always have, it's fun, I love a good cocktail, wine makes everything better, you can't go to a baseball game and not have a beer, everyone knows that."

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When those were my beliefs, those beliefs acted like blinders. As long as I didn't question them, which the fact of the matter is most people never do. Most people don't question any of the messages that we are taught from a very young age about alcohol and what it means to drink and what it means to be someone who drinks more than they want to, and what it means to be someone who doesn't drink.

Most people will spend their entire lives never questioning these thoughts. And as long as I didn't question the beliefs that I had, they served like blinders. I couldn't see what alcohol was trying to teach me over and over again because I was so stuck in the story, "God, why is this happening to me? Why is this my problem? Why do I have to deal with this?"

This is what I'm trying to teach all of you by having you look at the habit. Not just fall into I just got to be disciplined, let's just say no, I just got to practice being good. None of that. That's really what the 30-day challenge is about. The 30-day challenge to take a break from drinking, I say this over and over.

It's not about crossing days off a calendar. And if that's what you think it is, you're sorely mistaken because I will tell you, you can cross all the days you want off of not drinking. You can do it for a week or a month or a year, and you know what, you can do all of that and not change the habit because you weren't getting curious.

You weren't trying to understand what alcohol was trying to teach you and what the habit was trying to teach you. The work that I want all of you to do when you take a break, it's not about proving that you don't need a drink. It's about being truly curious about why you want it in the first place.

How can you transform looking at alcohol as if it's like a bad habit or a vice or an indulgence or a reward into a teacher? Because if you can do that, everything will change. Unwinding the habit will become so much easier. And it will shed so much light not only on your relationship with alcohol, but

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your relationship with food and stress and fun and your body and so much in the world.

I think one of the reasons why most people don't allow themselves to make this shift and to start seeing alcohol as a teacher is because in the back of their mind, they believe that they shouldn't have to learn it in the first place, or that they should be done learning. I definitely struggled with both of these beliefs.

So I'd tell myself like, "I don't want to learn. I just want to be able to drink like everyone else. I don't want to learn anything. I just want to be able to take it or leave it. I don't want to learn. I just want to wake up and stop feeling regretful. Like please, I have been in school for a very long time. I don't want to be in school anymore."

But if you release the idea that you should be done learning by now, if you release that idea, then every time you reach for a glass, you can find something new that not only will help you unravel the habit but will just help you as a human evolve.

And by the way, the same is true for food. You know, one of the things that I talk about a lot in my work is not siloing alcohol off as if it's this thing unto itself that nothing else is like. So many of the people that I work with discover that their relationship with alcohol and their relationship with food is very, very similar, and that they often replace one for the other.

And the same is true for food. You can look at every single meal and say every single meal has something to teach me, but only if you're willing to release the idea that you should be done learning by now. Food can also be a teacher, but you can't learn if you don't want to be a student.

That's what habit change is asking of you. I don't care what habit you want to change. It's asking you to be a student, and you have to really answer honestly, am I willing to do that?

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I will tell you this. My relationship with alcohol and food, it's light years from what it was 10 years ago. But I don't ever say that I'm done learning or that I've learned it all or that I've just mastered it. I am always open to being the student. I'm always open to learning and discovering more.

And I think it's a serious question that we all have to contend with. Are we willing to be a student forever? Are you willing to keep putting on the beginner's mindset and keep finding new things to learn and new things to discover? Are you willing to always challenge your assumptions and ask questions?

Are you willing to continually reevaluate something that you believe is true? Or are you like, nope, no thanks, I'm good, I should know it all by now, I don't want to question these thoughts, I don't want to question my beliefs, it's just true?

Habit change will not happen without thought change. That's what it boils down to. The think-feel-act cycle, that cycle that drives your decision to stop by the liquor store, or get a bottle out of the fridge, or grab a glass, or reach for another sip, all of those actions don't happen without a thought and a feeling.

You cannot change the habit without thought change. And you know what, what if your assumptions are wrong? Despite all of the evidence that you have, what if your assumption that you need a drink to have fun, or open up, or connect, what if it's wrong?

What if your assumption that pouring a glass of wine is the quickest way to relax is wrong? What if your assumption that having a drink makes everything better, or that having a buzz, you can be more like yourself, what if all of it is wrong?

I think that's great news. Because if it's all wrong, it means that you have the ability to change. It means that you can change your drinking and not

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live a life of feeling like well, I'm healthy, but I'm missing out. No one wants that. No one wants a life of just being healthy.

We're not here just to be healthy. We're here to have fun and to enjoy ourselves and to have pleasure. And I think that's part of the problem is that most of the time, people think that if they're going to change their drinking, it's all about health. And it's not about hey, maybe I can have more fun and more pleasure and more enjoyment.

We don't realize that's possible because of all these assumptions we have about how alcohol makes things better. And it's just easier, makes things more fun, helps me relax. So think about this today. What if the solution that everyone seems to agree that if you struggle with your drinking, you really should just stop drinking for the rest of your life, what if that solution isn't relevant anymore?

What if all-or-nothing approaches say you need to do something for the rest of your life, what if they're part of the problem? Because they reinforce this kind of black and white thinking. What if telling yourself that you can't drink actually backfires and it makes you want to drink more, it makes you want to rebel, it increases your desire?

What if the idea that you need to admit that you're powerless when it comes to alcohol and you need to hand your life over to a higher power, what if that idea worked really great in the 1930s when we knew very little about how the brain worked and how habits functioned, but almost 100 years later, it could use an update?

What if you could have the relationship that you want to have with alcohol? Whether it is to have no desire, to take it or leave it, or just simply stop beating yourself up about how much you drank last night. Imagine if that was possible. Imagine if you just stopped beating yourself up for it and be curious.

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And what if your critics are right? What if the people who are concerned about your drinking, what if they have a point? What if you do drink too much? What if it's true that some people do like you better when you're not drinking? What then?

I just want you to be willing to be open to all of it. All of those things that we don't want to challenge, all of the questions that we don't want to ask ourselves, if you're willing to be a student, if you're willing to think that there's always something for you to learn, changing the habit will just be so much quicker and faster and easier.

And I really do think it boils down to this; habit change is a daily practice. You cannot dip in and out and expect results. Because if you're not practicing habit change, you're practicing habit reinforcement by default.

So part of that practice, part of what you are doing, it has nothing to do with how much you're drinking and has everything to do with how much you're willing to be open and to learn and to question all of these beliefs, and perhaps see alcohol, see how much you drank last night as a teacher that's not here to scold you, it's not here to tell you that you're a screw up, it's not here to tell you that something's different or wrong about you, but it is here to help.

Let alcohol be your teacher. It will change everything. Alright, that's it for today. I will see you next week.

Okay, listen up, changing your drinking is so much easier than you think. Whether you want to drink less or not at all, you don't need more rules or willpower. You need a logical framework that helps you understand and, more importantly, change the habit from the inside out. It starts with my 30-day challenge. Besides the obvious health benefits, taking a break from drinking is the fastest way to figure out what's really behind your desire. This radically different approach helps you succeed by dropping the perfectionism and judgment that blocks change. Decide what works best

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for you when it comes to drinking. Discover how to trust yourself and feel truly powered to take it or leave it. Head on over to RachelHart.com/join and start your transformation today.