

Ep #239: Drinking Amnesia



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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 239.

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.

Hello, hello, hello everyone. Welcome back. I had a two-week vacation. It was amazing. I loved it. I'm so happy to be back here though and happy to be talking with you today about drinking amnesia.

I want to explain to you this topic and how it connects to the process of changing the habit of drinking. Now, I kind of came up with this idea when I was reading this article about what's going to happen after the pandemic.

So the idea of the article was saying that there are three ways that society really emerges from a pandemic. There's rebirth of a culture, there's death of a culture, or there's cultural amnesia. And I thought it was so fascinating as I was reading through this because I was thinking about how this actually relates to drinking and changing the habit of drinking and emerging from the habit.

So I want to explain these terms as I learned about them in the context of the pandemic, and then I'll talk about how this relates to your drinking and the habit change. And I just like giving you all new ideas and new ways to think about the work that you are doing.

So this article presented three different possibilities. So when a pandemic ends, you can have the rebirth of a culture. So the example they gave for that was the Black Death. This is the bubonic plague in the 1300. And it's crazy if you do any research on this, I don't know a lot about it, but you have between 75 and 200 million people who perished.

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But it wasn't just that people died. All of these changes happened to the world's economy and politics and religion, and it led to the foundation of the European renaissance. This time of innovation and exploration and creativity. And so out of the pandemic, in this case, came the rebirth of culture.

Now, that's not the only way that society can emerge. They also use the example of a death of a culture. They talked about the smallpox plague in the Americas. So in the 1400 you have Christopher Columbus and his crew landing in what is now the Bahamas and more and more people from Europe start coming.

And guess what, they bring smallpox and influenza and other viruses, and it just decimates many of the indigenous communities there. Some estimates actually have on Hispaniola the inhabitants going from upwards of 60,000 indigenous people to less than 500 in about 50 years. It's crazy.

So out of that pandemic, you have this vibrant, rich, and unique culture that was totally decimated. And then they also gave the example of how society can emerge from a pandemic through culture amnesia. And the example they gave in this article was the Spanish flu.

So talking about the Spanish flu in 1918, it was a worldwide pandemic, and they talk about how in the US in particular, we kind of rushed out of the pandemic and went right into the roaring 20s. So right into this time of like, let's forget about what happened, let's just have a good time.

And so I was reading this article and I was thinking, you know, these outcomes about how society emerges from a pandemic, they actually have a lot of parallels I think with how people emerge from a habit and what it's like when you're in the habit.

And that idea of rebirth and death or amnesia, it might sound like pretty stark terms to you. It's kind of heavy language. But I do think that there are

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some parallels worth looking at today, especially because we talk about habit change so much purely through this lens of okay, are you drinking or are you not drinking?

So you'll hear people say, "Well, I used to drink but now I'm sober," or, "I used to have a bottle at night but now I only drink glass." So we're so used to kind of understanding change in terms of the quantity of alcohol, and that might all be true, but I just think that there's so much more happening beneath the surface inside of you and that to me is so much more interesting to talk about.

So I think that these terms of rebirth and death and amnesia, although kind of stark, they actually can help you start to understand the process of change in a much more interesting and deep way, rather than how much did you have to drink or are you drinking or are you not. I just think that it's more exciting.

So I wanted to start with amnesia because you know what, I think that's where most people start, myself included. I was reading that article and thinking like, I had amnesia about my drinking for a very long time, especially amnesia when it came to hangovers.

So I was thinking back, and I was remembering this night in college. My first year of college. This is so silly. I was playing Trivial Pursuit and doing shots of gin, which is just so disgusting and also kind of weird, but that's what we had on hand. And I remember waking up the next day feeling so sick, so terrible. And I just swore up and down, I'm never going to have gin again in my life.

And now if you listen to this podcast, you know that did not hold true because one of my favorite cocktails used to be a gin and tonic. But it's really fascinating because I really swore to myself, I'm never going to touch that again, but soon enough, amnesia kind of set in.

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And not just in that one situation from college, it would happen to me over and over again. I would forget about either how bad I felt the next day or what I was embarrassed to have said or done. I would forget about it. I would get this kind of amnesia about what happened.

So what happens, I think we get enough distance from that night that was really messy, and we start to say, "Maybe it wasn't that bad, maybe I'm making too big of a deal," or we start to forget about the kind of physical symptoms.

So you might be forgetting about the kind of emotional ramifications, but maybe you're also forgetting about how you felt the next day. And I think it's really useful to think about where you might be having amnesia when it comes to your drinking.

So maybe you get a negative result from drinking, and maybe it's a hangover. Maybe it's not. Maybe you just find that you're more likely to end up arguing with your partner, or you're not being as productive as you want in the evenings because you're vegging out on the couch with a bottle of wine and Netflix.

Maybe you don't like all those extra calories from the drinking and all the extra snacking that happens when your inhibitions are lowered. Maybe you just don't like the example that you're setting for your kids. All of you can find probably some sort of negative result that you don't like.

And we'll have these moments where we'll say this isn't working, I need to change my drinking. I can't even tell you how many times I had that thought. This isn't working, I need to change my drinking. But then it's like this amnesia kicks in.

So we have all this evidence that it's not serving us, and we have all this information about how we don't like how we feel, whether physically or emotionally, we don't like the results that we're getting, and then it all goes

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out the window. And I will tell you this; I was stuck in amnesia for years. I mean, probably over a decade. I was in this kind of continual forgetting.

And at that time, I really thought, “God, Rachel, why can’t you just learn your lesson? How many times are you going to do this?” That’s what I really thought was going on was an inability to learn my lesson. But what I discovered through doing the work that I teach here is it wasn’t that I wasn’t able to learn my lesson. It’s that I didn’t know how to acknowledge all the positive benefits that I was getting from drinking.

I talk about this a lot. We can’t just think about the negatives. We have to also really consider what are the benefits, what are the positives, how is it helping you. And if you’re listening to me and you’re thinking, “Listen, there’s nothing positive about my drinking,” trust me, there is. There is a benefit.

You have to discover what that is for you. Maybe it’s that you don’t have to sit with the discomfort or the restlessness when you have that desire to drink or the desire for more. Maybe you feel like you’re saying no to yourself all day long and you don’t want to say no here.

Maybe it’s the benefit of not having to feel awkward or anxious or bored or lonely when you pour that glass of wine. Or maybe it’s the benefit of just feeling like I’m just going to have a better time, I’m going to have more fun, I’m going to enjoy myself more, I’m going to be more outgoing if I have this drink.

I was stuck in this place of amnesia about my drinking for so long because I didn’t want to lose the benefits that I was getting from drinking, and I didn’t know another way to get them. I knew nothing about the think-feel-act cycle, I knew nothing about how my thoughts and my feelings and how I showed up in the world, how that was all connected.

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And so that's why I kept having this amnesia. Now, the problem is I think a lot of you can relate to this, having this amnesia but you have it about your drinking again and again and again, and here's what happens. It starts to kill off your potential.

I'm not talking about actual death here. I think that's what a lot of times when we think about people drinking too much, we think about harm that is done to the body. You're hurting yourself, it's poison, you're shaving years off your life. I don't want to talk about that.

First, if you listen to the podcast, you know I definitely do not like thinking about alcohol as poison. I think that there's a lot of negatives to doing that and that can actually really backfire. But I think it's more important to talk about the death of your potential, the demise of your ability to achieve what you're capable of.

Because you are capable of so much. Everything that you have accomplished up until this point in your life, I don't care who you are, it's just the tip of the iceberg. You have so much potential. All humans do.

Now yes, when you're drinking too much, when you find that you're drinking more to try to get the same effect or the same buzz, of course it puts a strain on your body. And of course, you may be making decisions that you wouldn't otherwise make if you weren't drinking. And those decisions may be risky.

You may be making decisions about who you're having sex with, or whether you're getting behind the wheel of a car, or whether you're doing something risky. That can all put stress and strain and damage on your body. Some of them can have deadly consequences.

But I don't think we talk enough about the death of human potential. That to me is something that more people need to just think about and explore for

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themselves. What is that potential for you that is dying? Because your mind is becoming preoccupied with drinking.

I really do believe that there is this notion that only people who drink really, really heavily, only people who are super addicted to alcohol are preoccupied with drinking. But you know what, in my experience, that is not the case. You do not need to be sipping from a secret flask to be killing off your potential, to be preoccupied with drinking. I wasn't.

My drinking did not look very different from many of my peers. We were getting drinks after work, we were going out on weekends, we were having boozy brunches. But the truth was there was a part of me that was very preoccupied with the habit. Very preoccupied with alcohol.

So I want you to just consider for yourself, consider, how much time do you spend looking forward to drinking? Anticipating it, desiring it? And then trying to control your drinking, coming up with all these kinds of plans or rules for yourself. How much time do you spend feeling bad about how much you drank or worrying about what you did or said or worrying about your drinking or if you're ever going to figure this out?

I think when you start to add it all up, you start to see that you're expending a lot of mental energy in many of these categories. So that's what I didn't realize for a long time. The death of my potential wasn't happening in the aftermath of a hangover. It wasn't because I was waking up the next day and being kind of a lug on the couch and not doing anything.

It was happening in all the time and space and energy that my mind was devoted to thinking about alcohol and desiring it and buying it and drinking it and getting tipsy and getting drunk, and then wondering the next day why I couldn't figure this out, why I couldn't learn my lesson, why this was a problem for me and not other people, why I couldn't drink like a normal person. I spent so much of my mental energy there and that's what was really blocking the potential that I had.

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Now, here's the thing; on the other side of everything that I teach, everything that I teach you on this podcast, on the other side of this is learning about how the mind works and learning about the think-feel-act cycle and how your thoughts and your feelings explain why it is that you have the desire and why it is you drank however much you did.

It's understanding how to engage with your urges without willpower. That's how you start to free up your potential, and that for me is where this work of rebirth comes in. And I'll tell you, I kind of hesitated using this word at first because it sounds like a religious conversion, being reborn.

But what I'm talking about is really getting to know yourself again. That really to me is a kind of rebirth. It's not about being born again. It's about really starting to know yourself and starting to flourish in your life.

I wrote this in an Instagram story the other day. I wrote how every time you drink too much, you're essentially turning down an invitation to meet yourself. And I really do like thinking about the habit in that way. Instead of focusing on saying no, no, don't drink, no, don't have another, no is how most people think about changing a habit.

But instead of doing that, instead of fixating on saying no over and over again, you can use the desire to drink and your urges and the habit as an invitation to say hello to yourself, to meet yourself when you have an urge that seems unbearable, and it won't go away. To meet yourself when you're not wanting to feel anxious or lonely or bored and you just want to pour that drink and feel better.

To meet yourself when you feel awkward or judged or left out, or like you're just not having as much fun when you say no. Saying hello, meeting yourself again, that's how you access your potential. That's how you evolve to the next version of yourself. It's how you flourish.

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And I really do think that that's what every person on this planet really truly deeply wants. It's a very human desire to want to see, hey, what is possible for me? What am I capable of? It's why humans are always asking the same questions. What's the point of all of this? Why am I here? What is my life all about? Aren't I supposed to be doing something important with my life?

Once humans have their basic needs met, we're not just fighting for survival anymore. We then are able to kind of grapple with these deeper questions of like, okay, now what? What am I here for? We're searching for this kind of deeper meaning.

And I think these questions are so common because there is this innate drive and desire to grow and evolve. And that is what I see for so many people, especially when I'm working with people inside of Take A Break. That's what I hear from people over and over again.

How they didn't understand that this work to change how much wine they were drinking on a Tuesday night was going to be the path forward to really unlock their potential and who they are and what they want to do. We have this desire to grow, even though I will just tell you, I will be really honest here, change can feel terrifying. It really was for me.

And I will tell you, not just changing my drinking. That freaked me out, but you know what, change in general for a very long time freaked me out. I told myself all the time, "I just want things to stay the same. I don't like change. Why can't everything just be consistent?"

That's what I really believed, that I didn't like change, that I wasn't cut out for change. But here's the thing; there was still this gnawing inside of me for something more to really understand my purpose and to not stay the exact same version of myself that I was in that moment.

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And I see that as really the work that all of you are doing here. And you're doing the work whether or not you're actively working with me or you're listening to the podcast because listening to this podcast is a way of challenging your beliefs about drinking and alcohol and not only that, what you're capable of.

The fact that you're here to me is a sign that you want to grow and evolve, that you have a desire to move into that next level. You have that desire to flourish, and it starts by meeting yourself. Meeting yourself in that moment when you want to drink, when you want another.

The goal of this podcast is not to get you to stop drinking. It's for you to understand why you drink and why it can be hard to say no. And I'll tell you this; it's not because alcohol tastes good, it's not because alcohol is intoxicating. It's because of everything that happens when you're face to face with yourself.

You meet yourself in that moment of an urge and I didn't want to meet myself for a long time. I just wanted to keep drinking. The why behind the habit, that asks you to move beyond the answers that so many people use to explain why they drink too much.

If you had asked me a decade ago why it was that I had trouble reining in my drinking, I would trot out my list of regular explanations. I don't know, I just can't stop once I start. I always overdo it when I'm in this situation or I'm with this group of people. I'm just an all-or-nothing person, addiction runs in my family.

That's what I told myself over and over again, but those reasons were actually the real problem. Those reasons that I was giving myself, that's what was preventing change. My drinking wasn't the problem. Those explanations for why I drank too much, they were the real problem because they were blocking my ability to grow and evolve.

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I was so sure that I knew the reason for why it was I struggled to say no. And the reason was in my mind back then, well, it's just who I am, this is just how I'm wired. You know what, that reason feels terrible and it's not true.

But I will tell you that those reasons that I would use over and over again, saying I just can't stop once I start, I always overdo it with these people, I'm just an all-or-nothing person, it runs in my family, those reasons led to me being constantly in this place of amnesia. Because I didn't know how to change who I was, and I really wanted to feel good.

I wanted to have fun, I wanted to be normal, I wanted to drink like everyone else. And so it was so easy to just forget about how this habit isn't really working, my drinking isn't really working. It was easy, I thought at the time, to just slip into that amnesia. But the more I did, and I did it again and again and again, the more that my potential died.

I couldn't evolve, I couldn't grow, I couldn't see what was possible. It felt like I was in Groundhog Day because it felt like I was just repeating the same mistake over and over, and so much of my mental energy was preoccupied with drinking.

I really thought that figuring out my drinking was just so I could stop feeling bad about myself the next day. That's what I thought when I embarked on this journey. I thought okay, I'm going to do this so I can just stop doing stupid shit when I'm drunk.

What I didn't realize was that actually, this was how I was going to unlock this deep potential inside of me that I didn't even know was there to be unlocked. And it came from accepting this invitation to meet myself over and over again when my desire showed up, or when I felt anxious or awkward or bored or left out or judged or whatever.

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That's where I got to know myself. Rather than drinking over the invitation that had been extended to me, I accepted it. And that's what I want you to consider today. The question for you is how are you currently emerging or existing in this habit?

Are you repeatedly slipping into amnesia night after night, week after week? Are you finding that there's kind of a death to your potential, that you're killing your potential because so much of your mental energy is thinking about drinking and desiring it and anticipating it and drinking it and then being buzzed or being drunk and then dealing with it the next day?

Or are you starting to do the really transformative work of meeting yourself and using this habit not as a problem that you have to fix but really as a way to learn how to flourish, a way to reconnect with yourself? Because there is a part of yourself, there is a part of you right now that is inside you that you just haven't yet unlocked that is so amazing and it has so much to offer this world.

So think about it in this way. Amnesia, death, rebirth. Which one are you going to choose to head towards? 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 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.

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