

Ep #240: Old Urges



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #240: Old Urges

You are listening to the *Take a Break* podcast with Rachael Hart, episode 240.

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, my friends, we are talking about old urges today. Which is kind of funny because as soon as I said that I had the image in my mind of an urge with a cane and a long beard. But that's not what I'm talking about today.

What I'm talking about today are urges that seem like, where did they come from? Like they're an urge that maybe you haven't experienced in a very, very long time. And I want to talk about how this happened for me recently.

And how it's such a beautiful opportunity for you to really examine how it is you respond, not just to an old urge, but to any and every urge that you have. Around drinking, around eating, around procrastinating, whatever it is.

So I had this experience recently, that as soon as it happened, I said to my husband, "I have got to do an episode about this." So I went back home to New England for two weeks. It was a two week vacation. It was amazing. We actually made it to every state in New England except Maine. But I will tell you that we only accidentally drove through Rhode Island.

But the majority of time we spent in Connecticut with my parents. And then we spent a week in Vermont where I had rented this lake house for some friends and family. And I will tell you, I love Vermont. I could barely get the words out how much I love it.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #240: Old Urges

I grew up going to Vermont in the summers when I was a kid. My grandparents had a cabin up in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont at a place called Lake Willoughby. And if you want to know how much I love Lake Willoughby, I will tell you that growing up when we finally got our family dog, which took a very long time of pestering my parents. But we finally got a dog and I suggested that we name our Collie Willoughby. That's how much I love Lake Willoughby.

It's one of my favorite places in the world. But I will tell you, I hadn't been back in over a decade. So I was really excited. And I told my husband, "Listen, while we're here, while we're at this lake house, I really want to make sure that we hike up to the top of Mount Pisgah.

So Lake Willoughby is bordered by two mountains. One of them is Mount Pisgah, and if you hike all the way up to the top you just get this fabulous view of the lake and of the mountains. And just to me it's like peak Vermont. Peak beautiful New England.

And so I have done this hike twice before. And it is not a hike that is, I think, great for a toddler. So during one of the days that we were there I said to my parents, "Will you watch my son while he naps so that my husband and I, we can go up, we can go on this hike?" And that's what we did.

Now I want you to keep in mind that it's probably something like 1300 feet of a climb. It was a hot and muggy day. I'm not necessarily in tip top physical shape. I'm not out of shape but I haven't been doing a lot of hiking in the last couple months.

I mean, I hike in California. And we had done some easier hikes in Connecticut the week before. But this was something that was going to take a lot of energy. Now I have done this hike up to the top of Mount Pisgah, I had done it twice.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #240: Old Urges

Only twice in my life before. I had done it once in 2007 and once in 2011. So a long time ago. It's not like this trail is imprinted on my brain. It's not like I've done it over and over again. I've only done it twice before, but it is a familiar trail.

So I've walked this trail before, both times were in the summer. And I decided to do it with my husband, and we are huffing and puffing up to the top and sweat is dripping down my back. And we reach the top and the lookout and it's amazing. And I'm loving it and we started the descent back down.

And we were about a third of the way down the mountain and my brain was like, "You know what would be good right now? A nice cold beer." And I will tell you, I very rarely have urges to drink anymore.

So my brain went from this place of like having so much chatter all the time about drinking and so many urges, to really being very quiet on the subject. And here I was descending a mountain and my brain was like, "Hello, ice cold beer, any takers? Any takers?"

And I will tell you that thought flew into my head and it really did make me laugh out loud. I mean, I stopped. I stopped mid trail and turned around to my husband and was like, "You're not going to believe what just happened. This is so wild, and I must do an episode about this."

But I really want you to just consider for a second, what it would be like to meet your urges. To meet the urge to drink with that kind of laughter like, "Oh my god, what are you doing here? I am climbing a mountain." It just seemed so ridiculous to me at the time.

But as I started to think about it a little bit, I was like, "Wait, you know, this actually kind of makes a lot of sense." I've climbed this mountain twice before. My brain has hiked the exact same path. It was the exact same

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #240: Old Urges

time of year, I was doing it in the summer. And when I think back to the times that I climbed the mountain in 2007 and 2011. I remembered I did finish both of those hikes by drinking a beer.

Now, and let's just be honest here, it was not a beer. I'm sure I finished both of them by splitting a six pack with someone. So we still had my grandparents' cabin back then. Back then I finished that hike, and I went and sat by the lake and drank beer.

And suddenly I realized, "Oh, my brain is just doing what the human brain does." It's remembering and reminding me when and where it gets rewards. And it didn't matter that 10 years – I really want you to think about this, 10 years had passed since I last hiked up this mountain. My lower brain was like, "Hey, I remember this place. I remember what we do here. We're getting a reward. Right? Right?"

It wasn't the act of hiking because I hike lots in California. It wasn't being in Vermont because I had been in Vermont for several days. It was literally the memory of this trail. And I really want you to think about that.

I want you to just remember how your lower brain, it cares about rewards. Find pleasure, avoid pain, and try to do it as efficiently as possible. Alcohol for your lower brain is a great reward. It's easy, it's concentrated, it takes very little energy. And that lower brain thinks that rewards are just important for survival.

Now, you know that this is not the case when it comes to drinking. You know that alcohol is not important for your survival, but your lower brain is acting in a really primitive level. Its job is just to memorize when and where the rewards come so that it can remind you to go get them again. And there I was on the mountain and my lower brain was doing its job.

Ep #240: Old Urges

I had this urge from over a decade ago appear. And I want you to consider how would you have responded in that moment? Because I will tell you I work with a lot of people who would say like, "God, it's kind of a bummer. You got to be kidding me. I've been doing this work for over a decade and my urges are still going to come? And in these like weird times and places. I'm on a mountain. You know, this is demoralizing."

I know a lot of people would really respond in that way. But I just think it's so fascinating because the urge is just a thought. I had a thought, "You know what would be good? A nice, cold beer." It's just a sentence that then creates desire. It doesn't mean anything about me or my progress or how much I have or haven't changed my desire.

But I think what happens is we approach urges as if they're like this big, serious thing. Like, "Oh no, it's back. It needs to go away. It shouldn't be here. Why am I still having these urges after all this time and all this work?" I mean, I could have made that urge on that mountain mean all of that.

I could have been like, "Oh my god, what the heck? Why are you here? Go away. I don't want to have to deal with you. I'm trying to have a nice hike with my husband. It's been 10 years, leave me alone."

But it really is your attitude towards the urge that makes all the difference. And in that moment, I just stopped in my tracks, and I was just fascinated by it. I was fascinated to see my mind at work. And I was so curious like, "Hey, what's going on here? That's strange, I wasn't expecting you to show up."

But I didn't make it mean anything. I didn't give it any power. And I think that's one of the problems, it's so common for people to talk about urges as if they are unbearable, or too strong, or too powerful and we can't say no. And I think that that really is part of the problem. It's how we think about urges that gives them all of their power.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #240: Old Urges

Because here's the thing, it's just a sentence. Every time you have the desire to drink, if you start seeing it as, "Yeah, it's just a sentence. It's just a sentence in my mind. That's it. It's not powerful. I don't need to fight it. I don't need to be annoyed at it. I don't need to want it to go away." Because all of that, that's what gives the urge power.

Suddenly, when we're fighting it and resisting it, we're annoyed that it's here. Suddenly, we've made that sentence really matter. Rather than like, "Yeah, my brain has lots of sentences that just float on by, not a big deal."

I was thinking about this also too because we have been watching this show on Apple TV called Dickinson, which is all about the poet Emily Dickinson. I really love it. It's kind of quirky. But Emily Dickinson wrote something like north of 1800 poems in her lifetime. I mean, just so much poetry.

And one of the things that I really love that they do on the show, when the character is thinking of a verse for her poem, they show the words appear on screen and then kind of vanish. And so you see a sentence kind of come and go on screen, almost like smoke. So one instant it's there and then the next instant, it's gone.

And I love the way that they do that. Because to me, that really is kind of the approach that I have with all of the sentences in my mind, but especially the thoughts that I have that create desire, especially my urges. It's like one minute I'm hiking down a mountain. And the next thing I have this desire to drink. But that sentence, right, it was just like a wisp of smoke. It was there. And then it wasn't. It was like poof, it's gone.

But my response, that's what mattered so much. And my response in that moment, in addition to a little bit of laughter was fascination. Like, "Whoa, I don't normally have the urge to drink when I'm hiking. What's going on?"

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #240: Old Urges

I wasn't angry, or annoyed, or frustrated, or demoralized. I didn't make it mean that I hadn't changed or that somehow, I had missed doing a big important piece of work on changing my desire or changing the habit.

I was like, "No, hey, this is what lower brains do. It's taking in the time and the place in the situation and remembering, hey, we get rewards, don't we? Isn't this what we did the last two times?" And I think that's the beauty of an old urge. Because it's kind of showing you so clearly the habit at work.

I want you to consider how different it would be for you if you approached every single one of your urges this way. "Oh, hi, you're here? Weird. I wonder why. That's kind of fascinating." Rather than having the urge appear and it's some sort of big pronouncement on your progress or how you haven't changed or how you have so much more work to do.

I really think about it like I love my urges. They're so fleeting, they're gone as quickly as they came, just like all urges are. But they have so much to show me and so much to teach me. And also like that wisp of smoke, right? Like you can't grab on to it. You don't need to, it's just going to disappear on its own.

So I loved that that happened for me on the mountain. And I'm glad that I got to do this episode for you. Because I really do want you to see that even though for me in my life right now, I very rarely have the desire to drink. It does appear sometimes, and it does kind of crop up sometimes in moments that I'd be like, "I was not expecting that."

But you really can use this as a way to see what is my kind of knee jerk response. Am I resisting? Am I annoyed? Or am I filled with just curiosity and fascination and an understanding of like, "Yeah, of course you're here. This is how that lower brain works."

Ep #240: Old Urges

The question then is how am I going to utilize my higher brain and my prefrontal cortex and my ability to respond and my ability to attach meaning to it? That's what really matters.

So I'll just say, I love Vermont and I love that it gave me this old urge. All right everyone, 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.