

Ep #188: Navigating the Void



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With Your Host

Maisie Hill

The Maisie Hill Experience with Maisie Hill

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This is episode 188, and today I'm going to be talking about what's been going on for me personally recently and my experience of being in the depths of the void. I'm going to be explaining exactly what that is and just how I'm doing with that. This is a conversation I feel really cool having with you so let's just see where it goes.

If you want to do things differently but need some help making it happen then tune in for your weekly dose of coaching from me, Maisie Hill, Master Life Coach and author of *Period Power*. Welcome to *The Maisie Hill Experience*.

Hi, folks, it is wonderful to be back. I have been so ill recently like a lot of people in the UK. I did test three times for COVID. All the tests came back negative, but I had all the symptoms. It was definitely a virus of some kind that just worked its way through me. Thankfully, whatever it was, Nelson and Paul didn't get it, but it's been taking me a while to recover.

And I have to say, though, it was fantastically timed because the three days where it was peak illness where I was just in bed and unable to eat anything. They just happened to coincide with when the equestrian eventing was on at the Olympics. So whilst I was going in and out of sleep, I got to watch all the dressage, then the cross country and then the show jumping.

But it really made me miss my horse, Buttons, because I couldn't make it downstairs, let alone go to visit him. And he had the proper hump with me when I did go because any time I'm ill or I go away, he has an opinion about it, and he lets me know that he is unhappy when I return. It's really sweet. But my brain still feels like it's working slowly and intermittently, just as I recover from being ill. And I've coached so many people on this over the years with just the frustration of that, but really my attention span, my memory are terrible.

So I have given myself the coaching that I have often given others, which is to just radically reduce my expectations of myself. So please bear that in mind any time you are ill or recovering from illness, reduce your

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expectations. We cause ourselves so much additional pain and suffering by maintaining the same expectations of ourselves without fully accounting for how we're feeling and that we are still recovering.

And as I said, I do find that frustrating because there's many things that I would love to be able to focus on right now, plans that I had made, work that I wanted to get done. But one benefit of having a bad memory right now is, I just don't have the capacity to keep these things at the forefront of my mind, so, I'm just forgetting them. There's another reason for that, which I'm going to get into.

But thankfully, whilst I've been ill, summer has finally arrived here in the UK. I'm looking out of my studio window at the gorgeous blue sky and nice gentle breeze. I have to say, the weather this year has been really discombobulating for me. It has thrown my sense of time off and that sense of where we are in the year. And I think the arrival of my son's summer holidays was particularly shocking because at that point it wasn't even T-shirt weather.

So I've been ill, the weather threw me off a bit. And these are two of the, I would say the smaller factors that's been affecting me recently. And I really want to fill you in on the rest of what's been going on. Usually I share this kind of thing when I'm on the other side of it, when I've gone through it, had the experience, learnt the lessons, integrated them to the point where it feels appropriate to then share them with you. But I feel really cool to share this with you whilst I am in it.

And I have really thought about that and thought, why do I feel cool to do this? Is this a good idea? I've kind of really examined that and I've come up with a few answers to that and one is that I just feel like I have to. And I don't mean that in a forceful, following some weird rule in my head way. I mean I have to. I feel compelled to share this because it will be useful to some of you.

The second reason is that doing so, sharing what's going on for me is a way of honouring the power of the experience that I'm having because this

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is the kind of stuff that happens in the shadows. And because of that, it's often unseen, or it can even be kept hidden, so I just want to reveal what's going on. It's also really important that we just have these discussions, especially in the world of entrepreneurship and business.

My clients who are burnt out, who have chronic health issues, who are neurospicy, they often comment to me about the lack of transparency and lack of conversation from people who are running businesses, who are successful entrepreneurs because many of us are impacted by these things. So it's important to me to be transparent and it's actually hard for me not to be transparent about it.

I've just actually thought of another reason, and I would say this is actually the most important. I want you to see how this kind of experience doesn't have to be a problem. Because what's been fascinating to me, when I've been telling the people in my life what I've been going through is, how many of them have assumed that what I'm going through is a problem for me and therefore is something that needs to be solved for and fixed. Not everyone has responded that way, but many have.

And I know at this point you're probably wondering what the hell's going on. So let's just get into it. This year has felt hard for me. Things that I have been doing for a long time that have always felt easy and enjoyable, have become a lot harder and they've required more of me. Sometimes that's been about energy levels, the ability to focus. Sometimes it's been about an internal resistance in me. And that internal resistance can sometimes be related to what's referred to as demand avoidance.

But there's something else at play which is about being unwilling to perform, being unwilling to slip on a mask and do something that someone else would like me to do and probably at some point that I really wanted to do. Opportunities that I would have loved and indeed have loved in the past. But with this version of me, in my current identity, current way of being, my internal guidance system is like, "No, we're not going to do that." And sometimes I'm like, "Really, are you sure that's what you're saying. Do you not want to change your mind?"

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And so there's a really interesting conversation going on in myself. And on the physical front, there's been times where it's just felt like I'm wading through treacle and just doing the basics has taken effort. And I like putting effort into things. I love doing that. I love getting down to work, so I'm not averse to doing this kind of thing, but it's just felt completely different this year. And so, doing the basics has required more, then add in a book coming out and any additional tasks or projects which of course come into play when you have your own business.

And there are things that I have done, and they've gone well, and I'm really pleased that I did them, but I've needed more time to recover from them and then that has consequences. That's resulted in less capacity to do those other things and the day-to-day work. And it was only recently that it dawned on me that I've actually this year lost the ability to hyperfocus on work.

And my ability to hyperfocus is a large part of how I have been able to get so much done in recent years, especially when it comes to writing books, creating the podcast, creating resources for the membership and all the other things that I do. And without that ability, it's been like losing my superhero powers. It's like I have kryptonite near me all the time, that's just sapping me and preventing me from doing the things that usually come so easily to me and impacting my ability to think and do things. And this hasn't happened overnight.

When these things happen overnight, it's easy to spot them, but it's been so gradual. This creep has happened, it's crept in. And when that creep happens, we don't notice it often until it gets really bad and/or someone else points it out to us or something is reflected back at us that helps us to recognise what's going on. And so I was thinking, is this just the next stage of perimenopause, is that what's going on? But although I think that can account for some of it, it doesn't wholly track with what I have been experiencing. It doesn't sit right with me.

I do think my hormones are influencing what's going on. I didn't think it was just that. And I'm definitely in the phase of life where breakdowns and

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breakthroughs happen and that's related to that perimenopausal transition and journey and I'm here for that. I love it. I love the breakdowns and the breakthroughs. I'm at home with that. But then I started getting pins and needles in the morning when I woke up and like a lot of autistic folks, I sleep in an interesting position with dinosaur hands is what we call it.

So I sleep with my arms all tangled up and tucked away under other parts of myself. And combined with the warmer weather recently, I thought, maybe it's just circulation and getting older because I know that this impacted my dad fairly early on in life. So, I was kind of just like, "Is this just getting old?" And it was only when I started getting a twitchy eyelid that my brain finally kicked into gear and I was like, "Maybe there's a nutrient deficiency, maybe this is B12, maybe there's something going on and it's not just getting old."

So I started taking liquid B12 and eating chicken liver and those symptoms just went away within a few days. But then I'd stopped taking it because I wanted to do a blood test and really see what's going on and you're not meant to supplement for, I don't know, two weeks or something prior to testing. Anyway, blood results came back showing I'm deficient in iron, B12 and also folate, which was surprising to me. So no wonder life has been feeling hard. And there are links between those nutrients and the hormonal changes in perimenopause so I'm really glad that I found this out now.

And I think it's largely due to the food aversions that I can have from being autistic. So sometimes I can eat really nutrient dense meals with a real variety of foods, meat, greens. And then other times I'm just like, "No, not eating that." And what I eat is in the beige category of food types. And I do have one safe meal now that ticks lots of nutritional boxes. It's a salad with grilled chicken, rocket, Manchego cheese, apple and olive oil, and that's pretty good for a safe meal.

So safe foods or safe meals or the foods that an autistic person can reliably eat because they don't have aversions to it, and it's usually comforting to them as well. So they're often things like pop tarts or chicken nuggets or mashed potato, because they're always the same and the texture and taste

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is doable for that person. So for me, a big one has always been macaroni cheese, but I have to make it. And it has to be done with a particular pasta shape from a particular shop and it's not fancy, by the way, it's very basic.

But I've been working on increasing my safe meals that are enjoyable and appealing so that I'm able to eat them when I'm dysregulated. And it was really quite devastating for me because there used to be this really great pack of ramen. I can't remember what brand it was, but it was really good. It was a kind of upgrade on a pack of ramen, and I get it from our local shop. Nelson loved it too, so that was great. And we would boil eggs to go with it and add some choy sum or something, so it was protein, greens, etc, and that was a really good safe meal for me and then they stopped getting it.

I was really devastated and remain devastated and it's out of stock everywhere. I look every week online and every time I go into the shop, which is most days, I just see if they have it in case they do. And those of you who are autistic or who have autistic kids will get what I'm talking about. So I'm just hoping that it magically appears at some point. But the other aspect of this is that there's also foods that I avoid or limit because of histamine intolerance.

And there's also relationships between autism and histamine intolerance, between autism and the MTHFR gene and the ability to convert folate. And then also between histamine intolerance and B12 and folate and then the influence of hormones and so on and so on. So this is multidirectional. There's things going on here, but I can see how they all relate.

But what has been really useful is, I have a friend who's been dealing with similar nutritional deficiencies for a long time. And when I got the results back, I shared them with her and she was like, "Yeah, those levels make it hard to run a business and do anything beyond the bare minimum in life." And I got teary just to hear that from someone. Thank you. Thank you for saying that.

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So I've had this going on and I know at the beginning of this episode I spoke about how what I'm going through doesn't have to be a problem. And I just want to be clear that addressing these nutritional issues and the symptoms is definitely something to sort out. That's not what I'm talking about. What I'm talking about is something else. So in this conversation, I'm separating out these different elements, but of course they are all related and these aspects are multidirectional and all influencing each other.

So it's not entirely possible to separate it all out, but all this is going on and I am in the void. I've spoken about being in the void in the membership before. I don't think I've spoken about it on the podcast. And the best way for me to explain being in the void is to relate it to the menstrual cycle because probably most of you are familiar with it in that form. So we enter the void in the hours or days before we start bleeding, before we have our period. And it's when everything feels like it's being stripped away, when you feel raw and exposed and vulnerable, that's a very common experience.

And then in the lunar cycle, it's when the moon appears dark, the dark moon before the slither of the new moon emerges. It's also there in pregnancy in terms of the time before labour begins. And it's there in the creative cycle. It's there in all sorts of cycles and it's a liminal time. So if you're unfamiliar with that term, liminality is a state of transition between one stage and the next, and that can be between phases of life. It can be the time at the end of a cycle, whether that's your menstrual cycle or a creative cycle, the end of a cycle and before the next one begins.

It can also be during a rite of passage, because this concept of liminality comes from the field of anthropology. But in a general sense, liminality is an in-between period and it is marked by uncertainty. So thinking about after graduation, university or college, when the students who have just graduated are in that state of liminality before they enter the workforce and become established in their work, they're in that in between time.

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And when we're in this void, we are transitioning from what is known and familiar to the unknown, the unfamiliar. So it's the threshold between what was and what will be. And I think about it as a doorway or a portal that marks the end and the beginning. But when you're on that threshold, you're in the void, you're in a space where you're leaving the familiar behind you, but you haven't stepped into something new yet. So it's a moment of stillness that's also filled with potential, but it can feel quite empty at the same time. There's that great paradox there.

And the old is falling away, but you're unclear where you're going and you're becoming. So learning to embrace these liminal spaces can be really challenging because it's confronting and doing so requires us to let go of our need for certainty and control. Being in these liminal spaces is all about letting go and then letting go some more and to trust in that process. To trust in the process of transformation and more importantly, to trust ourselves.

But I think where people can make a bit of a mistake with liminality sometimes is this idea of the old is falling away and we're about to step into something else, so we just sit around waiting for that to happen. Liminality is something to actively engage with. So actively engage with that process of transformation and then evolve and grow in the in between moments.

And when I say moments, it can be the moment before you fall asleep at night. It can also be a period of months, or perhaps even years for some people. And it feels as if the world you know is dissolving all around you and within you, and that might feel disconcerting, it might feel alarming, or it might feel welcome, or all of those things and more.

And this process requires that things fall away, releasing parts of yourself that you've outgrown, letting go of expectations that you have of yourself and of others. Letting go of ways of being in relationship with others and with yourself, identity parts, stripping away, a reforming. And it's also that you can meet yourself in this place. And this is not easy if you're accustomed to pleasing everyone else and your life is built around the

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opinions and needs of others and that will be even more true if you lack trust in yourself.

So I feel very at home in the void. I have a lot of experience of being here. So I figured out how to be in it. And all the tools I teach in the membership are what I use to be in this place. It is not complicated. It's very simple, that doesn't mean it's easy. But often people will prefer to keep searching for techniques as a way of avoiding actually doing this work and being in this place and I know that most people are not at home here.

And interestingly, I think some people I know might prefer me to not be in the void because the void is the darkness of the depths. And that scares people, rightly so in some ways, because we should revere it, but also can we be with it and know its existence and what it means to exist here. So think of the void as a sacred space of not knowing. It's where our usual reference points and familiar structures dissolve, and in doing so we become untethered.

It's just like a current is sweeping us away to who knows where, and we don't know what the journey will be like. Are we going to drown? Will we ever return to where we've come from? No, you won't at least not in this form because it's impossible once you begin to leave and the current starts to lure you elsewhere. You can't return to the same place in that old version of you. And at some point you just have to surrender to the unknown and let go and that means encountering your deepest fears and accessing your self-trust and capacity for the unknown.

And I spoke about this in last week's episode, which is all about identity shifts. So if you haven't listened to that, I really recommend listening to that episode again because it's a perfect partner to this episode. To me, it's so weird how people talk about identity as something that's fixed, because my experience of identity is that it's always evolving and deepening and meandering and sauntering. I am continually shedding skins and reemerging, and I'm in the midst of that right now and who knows?

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Maybe I'll get some iron and B12 and folate into me, and that will change a lot. I'm sure it will, I hope it will. And this process of being in the void is important. It is not a problem to be solved. When I've told friends and acquaintances that I feel at sea at the moment and that I'm so far from the shore and my life as I've known it. That I have been detaching myself from the hooks of my own life and that I really have no idea what's next. I've seen the look of concern pass over their faces, and that's been followed by very loving recommendations as to what I could do.

And no shame to them, that just reflects how we're so conditioned to do something rather than just be in it. And as I said, I've gone through this a lot. I'm well versed in how this goes, but I remember getting coached by a really fantastic coach a couple of years ago and I described this feeling to them, described the process to them.

And they started coaching me on changing how I was feeling and I stopped them, I was like, "Look, this isn't a problem for me. I'm sharing where I'm at because it's relevant to our work together, but I'm okay with this feeling. I'm not in a rush to change it." Because I'm able to be in the lows, if we're going to call them that. I'm able to be there as much as I am able to be there with the highs. So I'm less keen on describing it in that kind of binary way, but I'm sure you understand my meaning.

And if I coached myself out of feeling this way, I mean it just makes no sense to me, I'd miss out on so much. So I feel at home with this. I'm well versed in the identity shifts and on changing things even when they're working really well. And the current experience I'm having is about change and innovation and breaking free from established patterns in my life, even ones that have worked very well for me. I'm breaking away from what's familiar in pursuit of the unknown.

I'm rethinking and reimagining my life. I'm wanting freedom and wanting to channel creative ideas. Freedom is hugely important to me anyway and there are places in my life where I'm very rule-abiding. Usually when the rules make sense to me, like speed limits, I strictly adhere to 20 mile per hour speed limits because I know the link between speed and injury and

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the difference between getting hit by a car at 20 versus 30. So there are times when I really follow the rules.

And sometimes I can trap myself in my own rules, that things have to be done a certain way. Sometimes that's an accommodation though, so there's nuance in that. But Paul refers to me as the rule maker and the rule breaker. And it does feel like I'm ripping up the rulebook right now. I'm questioning the way that I do things. And some aspects of my work and day-to-day have over the last year just become intolerable, not my work with clients, my private clients, my clients in the membership. That's the work that lights me up.

It's the other stuff, I'm just over certain conversations, they don't interest me anymore. I'm unwilling to fake it. The cost is too high for me personally and I just don't think it's useful to those on the receiving end either. It's a bit like when a bear is shedding its winter coat and it's just got to rub it off and I'm doing it now. It just rubs itself against a tree. The old stuff feels uncomfortable and itchy, and it needs to come off to reveal what's underneath. And that might mean that that old stuff is no longer there at all or there's just a reincarnation of it that does work.

And I've been feeling these nudges and niggles for a while. They've become more insistent this year with the volume gradually going up, and now it is loud. So I'm asking myself, what matters? What do I want? What in my life needs to shift in order to create and support that and what no longer does it for me and needs to change or be removed entirely? And what do I feel drawn to? And I have some answers, but I also don't have a lot of answers at this stage, and I have been okay with that.

And even the answers I have a bit of a sense of, they're not fully formed, and they shouldn't be at this stage of things. I know I want to be doing more coaching. I don't know what form that's going to take yet. I've got some ideas, so I'm going to play around with them and just really be in that process of play and experimentation because that's what's going to create the form.

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I described this to a friend as inviting some chaos and they were alarmed because their brain went to, well, chaos equals complete disorder. And understandably they were concerned about me running my business with this ethos. But I meant chaos in a different way because one of the dictionary definitions of chaos is the infinity of space or formless matter that preceded the existence of the ordered universe. It is all the potential that there is, and that chaos is what will create something, the what next, the next cycle, the next iteration of me.

So I am in this at the moment. I'm in the depths, I'm out at sea and it's not a problem. And embracing a void like this is an opportunity to become more comfortable with uncertainty and finding peace in not having all the answers and not having everything planned out and in control, etc. And trusting myself throughout that and trusting that clarity is coming. And I don't have to rush that because when we can sit with our discomfort and acknowledge our fears and anxieties, once we do that, we're able to be guided by our intuition and inner knowing and to be guided by that.

So that's where I'm at. I don't know what's next for me, but I'm excited to see what comes forth. Alright, lovely ones, I'll catch you next week.

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