

Ep #251: Stewing or Savouring: Where Your Attention Goes



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With Your Host

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This is episode 251, and this one might be a bit of a wake-up call, a very useful one. But buckle up because we're going to get into how much time do you spend stewing on things and fuming about them or fuming about people, compared to how much time you spend savouring enjoyable things. Let's get into it.

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*.

Hello folks. I have been having the best time coaching people recently. In the membership, we've been doing lots of coaching specifically on goals and decisions, and we're on a continued adventure that actually started with rewiring your inner voice and dealing with the inner critic. This was back in the summer, now. Then we moved on to protecting the asset, which was all about taking care of yourself. And then we started how to make any decision. So we're just wrapping that one up right now, and each of these themes has been a focus for the whole community.

And it starts with a power class that I teach, followed by coaching calls about each specific topic. And I have been having so much fun. I've been creating the content, coming up with what I want to teach you, and then I get to coach you on it. And it has just been a blast.

If you're not in the membership already, then come and join us now so that you can get involved with everything that's already waiting for you, but also so that you can join us in time for our next community challenge, which is boundaries. I know this is a big topic for all of you. I coach on it a lot. And we've got the holiday season coming up thick and fast. So I'm going to be focusing on boundaries within the membership. So this is the season to do some great work on boundaries, and I really want to help you. So come on in and join us.

Ep #251: Stewing or Savouring: Where Your Attention Goes

Now, I'm also about a month into my new small group coaching program, the Heard Within, and that's where I'm getting to play with a whole new framework with 12 wonderful women. It sold out very quickly, and all the applications for it were really good. But I really wanted this first group to be a maximum of 12, and I stuck to that.

But I'm loving the conversations that we're having and the situations that everyone in the group is bringing to get coached on. It's just, they're really rich topics, and it's always cool to see how, as I'm coaching one person, everyone else in the group is benefiting. Same goes for the membership. This is why I'm such a big proponent of group coaching. I mean, I love my one-on-one clients too, but group coaching is just, there's so many benefits to it. Basically, I just love coaching.

So on that note, let's get on to today's coaching topic, which came about because Paul and I were talking recently about how much I laugh because I really laugh. Like, when I get going, I bend over, I grab Paul's arms, and start pulling and pushing him away. He says it's like I'm changing the gear stick with how I move my arm. It's a very full-body experience for me, and I really cackle. Like, it's very loud and it's very cackly.

And when I was in Arizona back in September, I stayed at this ranch with the other people taking part on the course, and there was a couple of goats roaming around the property. And one evening, both of the goats were on the porch of the casita that I was staying in. And they were rearing up and like trying to headbutt each other, and they almost got my friend Scott in the process. And I was videoing this whole thing, and I couldn't stop laughing at what was happening. And then Scott started doing impressions of the goats, and I was just cackling away, and it's all caught on the video.

So Paul and I were watching the video, and he asked me a really interesting question, which is, why is it so easy for me to laugh? And I said, "Well, I feel great satisfaction with my life." And that doesn't mean it's always easy or that there's no challenges, but I enjoy my life. So my baseline for life is pretty high, which means when something funny

Ep #251: Stewing or Savouring: Where Your Attention Goes

happens, laughter is very available to me, right? It's not like I suffer with low mood, where perhaps it would take more for me to be brought out of that in order to be amused by something or to laugh at something.

And then Paul asked me why I feel great a lot of the time. And here's what I told him. I said that I know how to manage my mind to an exceptional level. There's a lot of thinking and feeling that most people experience that I just don't do because I've coached myself through these things or I've been coached through them, and I've just addressed them, and I've replaced unhelpful patterns of thinking and feeling and behaving with helpful ones. So there's a lot of stuff that I just don't have to contend with in my life anymore because I've raised the standard of how I think.

I also don't make my emotions a problem. So when I do feel anxious or upset, or I'm grieving, or I feel a bit down, I'm good with that, right? They are appropriate emotions for humans to experience. And of course, I experience them from time to time. I have a rich emotional life, and I can see how my thoughts also create my feelings. So I can interrupt the patterns of thinking that are unhelpful. But I also savour experiences that I enjoy. So whether it's food or good company or good coffee or the way light comes through a window and flickers on a wall, my senses delight in so many things.

Right now, it's the colour of the leaves on the Virginia creeper out on our garden fence, or it's the taste of a dulce latte, pear, and rocket sandwich that I am obsessed with eating right now. If you're in Margate and want a sandwich, do yourself a favour and go to Madre. It can also be the feel of Nelson's skin when he's holding my hand or hugging me, a super hot bath, the feel of fuzzy socks, watching the tide ebb and flow, or hearing the tide on the shingle and the sand. As I see and hear, and feel all these elements, I really savour them.

Even yesterday, I was getting stuff for dinner at the International Food Centre, which is a great place to buy food in Margate. You're getting all the Margate tips today. And as I was walking down an aisle, I saw out of the

Ep #251: Stewing or Savouring: Where Your Attention Goes

corner of my eye the Tunnock's logo. And if you know, you know. Tunnock's is a Scottish brand that makes caramel wafers, like that is just these thin layers of biscuit and caramel covered in a thin layer of chocolate. They also make tea cakes, which is like this dome of really delicious salty biscuit, and then it's got this, I think it's like marshmallow or something. And then there's the chocolate on the outside. And you can get the wafers and the tea cakes in supermarkets and cafes, like across the UK. But they also make something called a caramel log, which is less common. And I've only ever seen them in Scotland.

So all my family are Scottish. My mum is from St. Andrews, my dad's from Girvan, which is on the west coast, south of Glasgow. And when we would go up there in the summer or at Christmas, we'd visit this nearby town called Turnberry, which is near Girvan. And Turnberry's famous for its golf. Sadly, the hotel and golf course is now owned by Trump. But anyway, there was this little shop near the beach where we'd go and get stuff for being at the beach. Like we'd get cheese rolls and snacks for our picnic. And we'd build a fire on the sand every time we went there. It was a very quiet beach.

And I can remember one day we found a hedgehog, and my dad put it in my hands. I'm pretty sure I dropped it. That's my memory. One day, this guy landed on some kind of microlight. Like, I have so many memories from this one quiet beach. And there was even one time where the bus to go back to my aunt's house never showed up. We were waiting for ages. So we ended up hitchhiking home. And a coach stopped for us and took us all the way back to my aunt's house.

And the thing about this shop next to the beach was that I would always get a caramel log from that shop. I don't think I've ever seen them anywhere else. I'm sure they exist in other places, but you know, when just a particular thing is tied to a particular place in time, that's what the caramel log is for me.

So when I spotted them in Margate, I could not believe it. So, of course, I bought some. We were actually in Scotland last year, and I didn't see them

Ep #251: Stewing or Savouring: Where Your Attention Goes

then. I think I'd just forgotten that they even existed. So I think it's been a good 20 years since I last had one.

So I was sat in the car eating the caramel log, just really savouring the moment, right? The taste of it, but also the surprise of finding them. So that little rush of delight and even awe that comes from when something familiar just appears in an unexpected place.

And as I was eating it, it just took me back to being a kid on that beach with my dad, with my brother, with my cousins. The long train journeys up to Scotland, being at the beach, getting whipped with sand. And so I was just sat in the car eating this caramel log in Margate, but I was also back in Girvan, in my childhood, and I was just savouring the taste and the memories.

And that's what stewing on things can't do, because when you stew on things, it's actually trapping you in time. Whereas when you savour things, you get transported through time, and it expands your experience and takes you deeper into a connection of some kind instead of trapping you, which is what happens when you're stewing on something.

So how much time do you spend savouring enjoyable things versus stewing on things and fuming about them? So when we're stewing on things, we're ruminating about them, replaying a situation or painful memories in your head, and just getting more and more invested in how you're right and they're wrong, and you've been wronged by them, and all those "how dare they" thoughts that come into our heads. I can't believe they said that. They shouldn't have behaved that way. I wouldn't have behaved that way. Who do they think they are to treat you this way? So all those kinds of interesting thoughts come up.

And stewing is your mind's attempt to regain power somehow when you felt powerless. The idea being, well, if I can understand or replay this enough, then I can stop it happening again. But what actually happens is you relive the pain instead of resolving it. And the brain confuses repetition with

Ep #251: Stewing or Savouring: Where Your Attention Goes

mastery. It thinks that when you're looping on it like that, that you're learning something, but you rarely are because all it's learning is how to stay in that activated place.

So that activated place can come from hurt or worry or fear or just a sense of losing control somehow. And it can feel very productive when you're in it or very important for you to do, like you're protecting yourself or addressing the issue. But you're not. What you're actually doing is reliving the pain over and over again. And stewing gives your body that same hit of stress as if the thing was actually happening all over again. So your heart rate goes up, cortisol is released, all the other bodily responses that take place in response to stress.

Stewing, though, is very different to processing. So I do want to make sure that we're covering that difference. Stewing has that sense of stuckness, like I have the image of a car being stuck in the mud and revving the engine, but nothing's actually happening. Like when you're annoyed and then you dwell on what's annoying you, but that doesn't transform into action that actually shifts things, either by you shifting your thinking about a situation and creating an internal change that way or by taking action that then actually changes the situation. So instead, the engine just keeps revving, the wheels keep turning, but you're still stuck, except now you're really pissed off as well as stuck.

Whereas when we're processing something, that has a quality of movement to it, right? It might involve crying, writing, shaking, yelling, talking, anything like that. But there's an output. That energy goes somewhere, or it transforms into something else, whereas stewing keeps it contained, and you just go around in circles, staying stuck. Processing lets it move through, and it has that quality of transforming. That's how you know the difference.

So with stewing, you're extending a situation where you've experienced stress or negativity in some way, and because of your behaviour and your thinking, you're staying in it way longer than the actual event lasted for. But

Ep #251: Stewing or Savouring: Where Your Attention Goes

stewing and savouring use the same mechanism inside you, right? They're both forms of focus and amplification. The only difference is the direction, because when you're stewing, you're amplifying pain, resentment, stress, hurt, things like that. And when you savour, you're amplifying pleasure and connection or meaning.

So the good news is, even if you have very little experience of savouring things in an intentional way, you already know how to do this. It's just about using a skill you already have in a way that actually serves you because savouring is the opposite of stewing. It's when you expand and extend a positive experience and amplify a good thing.

So you're just really giving yourself over to the enjoyment of something. And you're using your thoughts, your feelings, your actions to just increase the intensity or the duration and appreciation of positive experiences and emotions. I do this all the time, and just like stewing, it is a mental habit that you can train yourself to do. But it's one that builds your capacity instead of depleting you or stressing you out. And when you take the time to intentionally savour things, you're teaching yourself that safety and joy and awe are worth paying attention to.

Now, in my family, I take the longest to eat a meal. That's because I chew. But also, it's because I savour the food. I want to really enjoy it. I can also savour the experience of cooking as well. So I enjoy it. I savour the flavours. But this is also something that I do outside of mealtimes. Like any kind of sensory experience in my day that's enjoyable, I really get into that. I think it's like an autistic trait that we're like really wired to be able to do this. Not necessarily all autistic people, I'm not going to speak for all of us, but certainly my autistic friends seem to really be able to do this as well.

So there are certain textures, sounds, moments in life that I really enjoy. And when they happen, they create these micro moments of safety within me that are regulating. But they're more than that, and I can appreciate them to the point of luxuriating in them.

Ep #251: Stewing or Savouring: Where Your Attention Goes

So, when was the last time that you luxuriated in something? Because savouring is a brief practice in which you notice something pleasing to you, right? Something that brings you joy, contentment, love, anything like that. And then you extend that feeling by amplifying and deepening it within you. And remember, you already know how to do this because you already know how to stew. So that means that you already know how to savour things because they're running on the same circuitry, attention, focus, and repetition. The question is, what is it that you want to amplify?

So if you ever noticed when you're frustrated with someone, you can start thinking about all the ways that person has annoyed you in the past. And in doing so, you turn the volume up on that frustration, and maybe it turns into anger. Right? This is the same, except it's with positive emotions. And those of you who've been around for a while will have heard me say, I'm not a fan of labelling emotions as positive or negative because they all serve a purpose. But you get my point.

So when you savour someone or something, you create a moment of ventral vagal activation, which is that sense of inner safety within you where the world feels alright and you are alright. And because of that, you're able to connect with yourself and with others, and your thinking brain is online. You can think creatively and problem solve, and enjoy your life. So every time you savour something, you're training your body to come back to safety and openness more easily. And at the same time, you're balancing out negativity bias, which is the tendency that we all have to focus on negative things or things that could potentially be a threat.

So negativity bias is ancient wiring. We have all evolved to prioritise threats because paying attention to what could kill you is what's kept us alive. But that same bias can keep you living in psychological survival mode, where you're always scanning for what's wrong instead of noticing what's right. So when you actively seek to savour things, that is retraining your system to notice safety.

Ep #251: Stewing or Savouring: Where Your Attention Goes

So when I was on my way home from Arizona, I missed my connecting flight, and I got dysregulated very quickly. So this training that I was doing there, it was a longer training week than we usually have. I think it was like eight or nine days.

So I was already ready to go home. And then there was loads of lightning which delayed the first flight. And I was just so determined to make the connection that I ran through the terminal. I was like yelling for people to move out the way. And by the time I reached the gate, I was drenched in sweat. I was very hot, which also really dysregulates me. And then I discovered that they'd just shut the door to the flight, to the plane.

So I'd missed my flight. I'm hot and sweaty. I'm annoyed and upset that I'm not going to be home in time for Nelson's football match. And then I found out that they only have one flight a day to London from this airport. So I wouldn't be able to leave on a direct flight for 24 hours.

Now, as an autistic person, I do have issues with lateness. I do not like being late, and I can also struggle with plans that change. Not always, but when it's something I really wanted to happen, there's an element of almost heartbreak that it's no longer happening. And that's what I was going through in the queue to reschedule my flight home. And the folks working at that desk must have to deal with so much emotion in everyone they're dealing with.

It was fascinating to observe once I was able to, once I had taken care of my own feelings, which I was doing really rapidly, because I knew if I didn't, I would have issues communicating with the staff at the desk, because when I'm having a meltdown or a shutdown, I start to have issues with my words.

So I actually used my longing to be home with Nelson to regulate me, which might sound odd at first because it was the longing to be with him and to cuddle him and feel his skin that made missing the flight hard. But it was also a vehicle for me to soothe myself.

Ep #251: Stewing or Savouring: Where Your Attention Goes

So the longing that made it painful became a way to soothe myself because I could use that longing and love as a route back into connection, which then meant I could think enough to make decisions about how to get home because I was able to think creatively, which we can only do when the thinking brain is online. And that meant I could make suggestions to the lovely woman trying to help me and come up with other ways to get home.

It also changed how I related to the woman helping me. So very interestingly, the guy next to me was making the same request I was to the woman helping him, but he was doing it with a completely different tone of voice and very different body language. And they explicitly told him, "No, we can't do that for you."

Now, who knows why I got my way and he didn't, but I do know that I wouldn't have been able to have that conversation if I'd still been dysregulated, and I'm pretty sure that the way I had that conversation meant that the woman helping me was open to helping me. Whereas the guy who was being rude and leaning over the desk, and he just, the way he was conducting himself was just not on.

So it ended up being that I got the result I wanted. I was able to get on another flight via Philadelphia. I can't remember the ins and outs of it, but it was a much more appealing way of getting home than the one that had initially been presented to me. So savouring is a really amazing skill for you to build. So here is your mission for this week, should you choose to accept it.

Notice when you are looping on something and stewing in it, and ask yourself if you're processing it or you're stewing in it. And if you are stewing in it, maybe you need to process it first. But can you catch one small moment every day for the next week that feels good to you and savour it, extend it by a few seconds? And I would just love for you to reflect on what would happen if you gave as much energy to savouring things as you do stewing. What would be different in your life? Because that's where the rewiring begins.

Ep #251: Stewing or Savouring: Where Your Attention Goes

Okay, folks, that is it for today. If you're interested in topics like this, if you want access to more materials like this that I cover in the Inner Odyssey, which is the course you get inside the membership, then come and join the membership. Sign up, take part in it, get coached on all the things that come up for you. We are having such a good time in there, covering all of these things in great detail.

And as I said, our community focus that's going to be coming up next is going to be about boundaries. So my suggestion would be for you to join now, get up to speed on the stuff that we've already covered, start implementing them, get coached, and then be really in a solid place for us to do this work on boundaries together in the run-up to the holiday season and the end of the year. What a great place to wrap this year up on. I can't wait to have you join us, and I'll see you in there, or I'll be back next week with the podcast.

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