

# Confessions - Book X - Chapter Viii

by St. Augustine

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## Transcript

12. I will soar, then, beyond this power of my nature also, still rising by degrees toward him who made me. And I enter the fields and spacious halls of memory, where are stored as treasures the countless images that have been brought into them from all manner of things by the senses. There, in the memory, is likewise stored what we cogitate, either by enlarging or reducing our perceptions, or by altering one way or another those things which the senses have made contact with; and everything else that has been entrusted to it and stored up in it, which oblivion has not yet swallowed up and buried.

When I go into this storehouse, I ask that what I want should be brought forth. Some things appear immediately, but others require to be searched for longer, and then dragged out, as it were, from some hidden recess. Other things hurry forth in crowds, on the other hand, and while something else is sought and inquired for, they leap into view as if to say, "Is it not we, perhaps?" These I brush away with the hand of my heart from the face of my memory, until finally the thing I want makes its appearance out of its secret cell. Some things suggest themselves without effort, and in continuous order, just as they are called for--the things that come first give place to those that follow, and in so doing are treasured up again to be forthcoming when I want them. All of this happens when I repeat a thing from memory.

13. All these things, each one of which came into memory in its own particular way, are stored up separately and under the general categories of understanding. For example, light and all colors and forms of bodies came in through the eyes; sounds of all kinds by the ears; all smells by the passages of the nostrils; all flavors by the gate of the mouth; by the sensation of the whole body, there is brought in what is hard or soft, hot or cold, smooth or rough, heavy or light, whether external or internal to the body. The vast cave of memory, with its numerous and mysterious recesses, receives all these things and stores them up, to be recalled and brought forth when required. Each experience enters by its own door, and is stored up in the memory. And yet the things themselves do not enter it, but only the images of the things perceived are there for thought to remember. And who can tell how these images are formed, even if it is evident which of the senses brought which perception in and stored it up? For even when I am in darkness and silence I can bring out colors in my memory if I wish, and discern between black and white and the other shades as I wish; and at the same time, sounds do not break in and disturb what is drawn in by my eyes, and which I am considering, because the sounds which are also there are stored up, as it were, apart. And these too I can summon if I please and they are immediately present in memory. And though my tongue is at rest and my throat silent, yet I can sing as I will; and those images of color, which are as truly present as before, do not interpose themselves or interrupt while another treasure which had flowed in through the ears is being thought about. Similarly all the other things that were brought in and heaped

up by all the other senses, I can recall at my pleasure. And I distinguish the scent of lilies from that of violets while actually smelling nothing; and I prefer honey to mead, a smooth thing to a rough, even though I am neither tasting nor handling them, but only remembering them.

14. All this I do within myself, in that huge hall of my memory. For in it, heaven, earth, and sea are present to me, and whatever I can cogitate about them--except what I have forgotten. There also I meet myself and recall myself[337]--what, when, or where I did a thing, and how I felt when I did it. There are all the things that I remember, either having experienced them myself or been told about them by others. Out of the same storehouse, with these past impressions, I can construct now this, now that, image of things that I either have experienced or have believed on the basis of experience--and from these I can further construct future actions, events, and hopes; and I can meditate on all these things as if they were present. "I will do this or that"--I say to myself in that vast recess of my mind, with its full store of so many and such great images--"and this or that will follow upon it." "O that this or that could happen!" "God prevent this or that." I speak to myself in this way; and when I speak, the images of what I am speaking about are present out of the same store of memory; and if the images were absent I could say nothing at all about them.

15. Great is this power of memory, exceedingly great, O my God--a large and boundless inner hall! Who has plumbed the depths of it? Yet it is a power of my mind, and it belongs to my nature. But I do not myself grasp all that I am. Thus the mind is far too narrow to contain itself. But where can that part of it be which it does not contain? Is it outside and not in itself? How can it be, then, that the mind cannot grasp itself? A great marvel rises in me; astonishment seizes me. Men go forth to marvel at the heights of mountains and the huge waves of the sea, the broad flow of the rivers, the vastness of the ocean, the orbits of the stars, and yet they neglect to marvel at themselves. Nor do they wonder how it is that, when I spoke of all these things, I was not looking at them with my eyes--and yet I could not have spoken about them had it not been that I was actually seeing within, in my memory, those mountains and waves and rivers and stars which I have seen, and that ocean which I believe in--and with the same vast spaces between them as when I saw them outside me. But when I saw them outside me, I did not take them into me by seeing them; and the things themselves are not inside me, but only their images. And yet I knew through which physical sense each experience had made an impression on me.

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