

# INTELLIGENCE IS NOT ENOUGH!

## IN PRAISE OF WRITTEN REFLECTION

by Dr. George F. Simons

Today, whether we travel for business or pleasure, we tend to move at jet speed. We run to make connections and do whirlwind, if-this-is-Tuesday-it-must-be-Auckland tours. Many of us have breathless and unconscious everydays, commuting to and from work, ticking off the lists of people to be talked to and things to be done. We are often consumed by the questions and demands of others. The "quick trip" is itself a snapshot of what daily life is like. The traveler needs to come home and unpack, to haul the bulging suitcase in the house and heave it up on the bed, open it, take out the dirty laundry, hang things up, and put them where they belong. Sometimes this is the first good chance to look at the postcards and souvenirs and snapshots that tell us where we've been and what we've done.

What's my life been all about since the last time I really came home to myself, to my beliefs, my values, my God, or my Ultimate Reality, and really unpacked? What valuable things have I picked up along the way? What's been lost or damaged or pilfered? What do I want to savor, taste, enjoy, share with others? What needs cleaning, shining, refilling, or renewal?

Without unpacking there is no room for filling,, and, the unpacking itself may reveal the resources we need to journey onward. Most of us have journeyed long to be here. All of us are on a journey of one sort or another. We will be "going on" from here.

When the founders of Mensa looked with almost missionary vision at the potential good to the world of gathering the highly intelligent in

fellowship, study, and comradeship, their values were showing.

Mensa has no entrance requirements beyond a proof of intelligence, and that is good, because it creates a forum of those with different values, a rich mix of political right and left, an exciting variety of personalities, and a cross section from the well-to-do to the down-and-out. Nonetheless, Mensa is about values, both personal and social. While much of this Congress has to do with the social and economic significance of this part of the world, I'm going to focus on personal values, yours and mine, how we digest and act on what goes on around us and within us, as we journey through this Congress together.

Not only has our concept of intelligence been undergoing refinement since the early days of Mensa, but our awareness of ourselves as whole human beings has been growing. The old splits between body-soul, mind-matter are being healed through holistic medicine, psychology and self care. We are not just "minds." In fact our "minds" are functions of our entire selves.

So, today, intelligence brings with itself the responsibility of developing one's potential to the fullest. This means care of one's body, physical fitness; it means care of one's emotional and thinking life, a kind of personality fitness, if you will. My purpose here is to talk to you about some skills that keep you fit as a person, specifically how to reflect on one's experience, to understand it, learn from it and enjoy it more deeply, that you may be more clear and powerful in your awareness and exercise of your values.

Human reflection has borne a variety of names. Sometimes have called it "meditation" or "prayer," others, "philosophizing" or "ruminating." It can be both verbal and non-verbal, "Sometimes Ah jist sits n' thinks, n' sometimes Ah jist sits!"

When ships and coaches were the traffic, seasoned travelers frequently kept a journal of their wanderings. It was partly pastime, partly a way of remembering, sometimes a source of stories to tell the stay-at-homes. Today the journal has become a way of talking to one's self and one's world. It is a way of knowing our story before we lose it and inviting our future to come about. It has become the method of choice for many people to unpack their lives at an occasional retreat or on a day to day basis. In its pages they can store, scrub and reflect, alone or in the company of friends.

Writing about ourselves always begins as a personal and private matter, and from this hidden start comes its power. It allows us to observe frankly, penetrate deeply, ventilate powerful emotions and dream mighty dreams. It becomes, as we allow it more and more honesty, a mirror in which to view our truest selves and set our deepest hopes and energies in motion.

Unlike so many therapies and self-help tools, the power of writing from which the journal takes its strength is not a new discovery. Great intelligences and great "reflectors" on human experience have often used writing as a tool. One thinks of philosophers like Plato and poets like Sappho in ancient times; one thinks of diarists of recent times like Anna Frank and Dag Hammerskold.

Let me take you back 1500 years to listen to the words penned by one of the greatest minds and most influential persons in Western intellectual history. We will observe him as he discovers the usefulness of writing at a particular point in the unfolding of his personal journey.

### **A Fellow Traveler Begins to Unpack**

Inside myself I had been debating many things. I'd been constantly searching and anxious. I was looking for my real self, trying to learn what was best for me and what things to avoid. Suddenly a voice came to me. Did it belong to me or to someone else. I wasn't really sure if it came from within or from some source beyond me--I was curious about that. It said:

Reason: Think for a minute. If you learn something important about those things that worry and concern you so, what do you do with it, where do you store it as your mind starts pursuing its implications?

Augustine: I suppose I'd store it in my memory.

Reason: Really? Do you think your memory can actually house everything that your mind uncovers?

Augustine: No, I don't suppose it can

Reason: So, you'll need to write things down. But that's a problem for you now when you don't feel well enough to write a lot. And, on the other hand, since they're matters that require privacy if you are to explore them, you don't want to dictate them to a secretary either.

Augustine: You're right. Now I'm feeling somewhat trapped and helpless.

Reason: Here's what to do. Pray for better health and for the help to do what you need to do—but, *write the prayer down*. Doing this will get you started writing and encourage you to continue. Later on, make a summary of what you conclude. Don't write to attract a following. Use a few people who are close to you as readers and that will be quite enough.

Augustine: I'll do what you say.

In this brief dialog, Augustine is as in touch with the basic features of journal keeping as any contemporary psychologist, therapist or spiritual director. Let's look at these features one at a time.

### 1. Writing has a Power of its *Own*.

Augustine, like many of us, turns naturally to writing when he's confused and upset. He doesn't quite know why, but it seems like the right thing to do. Setting pen to paper, he begins to discover why, namely because writing is a natural way of clarifying things. Memory plays tricks on us, even the most brilliant of us. We forget. We reevaluate. We get sidetracked. We lose track of our starting point and go around in circles. Confusion--it's knowing a number of things at the same time and being unable to put them together.

Writing our thoughts and feelings helps us to be precise about them, Writing draws the hazy and unformed impulses, our less than fully conscious parts, out into the open where they can be seen for what they really are. Ink fixes them in a place we can go back to. We can see where we've come from and where we're going. The seed, the tree and the fruit all become visible. As our pages accumulate, they connect like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle and reveal more and more of our inner landscape.

### 2. We're Always Talking to Ourselves.

We are filled with voices, some strange, some familiar, advising, approving, cajoling, condemning, arguing. We tend at least to interpret them as voices, but they are images and feelings, tastes, sounds and smells as well. Often they are memories whose intercourse has spawned children with new voices of their own. Sometimes they are legion, babbling us into madness. Occasionally one or the other gets the floor and dominates the conversation. When this happens we hear only one side of things, one set of ideas, one way of doing things. This may spell depression or addiction or stick-in-the-mud boredom.

Drawing on other parts of ourselves through writing, as Augustine does with his friend Reason, can lead us to fresh wisdom, alternative solutions for our problems, richer, more informed decisions and a kind of inner reconciliation as we discover that there is more to us than we thought, as opposed or unrelated parts of ourselves find each other and embrace. We listen to ourselves and we write. The inner voices find clarity and strength on the paper before us and we somehow own them anew as we hold them in our hands.

### 3. Writing Leads us from Privacy to Intimacy

The tender shoots of self understanding need a protected place to grow. Reason tells Augustine to guard his privacy. There he can go into his thoughts and feelings without the fear that someone is listening. It is a place to grow straight, a shelter where he will not be bent and twisted by the prevailing winds of other people's opinions or influenced by their approval or disapproval.

In the journal we don't have to censor or restrict ourselves out of the fear of what others will think or judge. Ultimately we do write to communicate, to say ourselves by being more

ourselves. Our personal word, our name, our self, unfolds into words. Our words take on the flesh of voice and action in our world.

The process begins with those closest to us when we risk saying and being someone new. There's a certain obscenity about broadcasting our innards for all the curious of the world to see. The journal is ours to keep and to share as we choose. Like Augustine, we reveal ourselves at first only to a few trusted friends, or to advisors and counselors. In their company we are mutually enriched by deep honesty and caring. Out of these sharings is born true community. We encourage each other on our personal and common journeys. We take heart from this personal and contemporary witness to searching and values. We wonder at the incubation of insights and the birthing of moral decisions and the maturation of intelligence and spirit.

All that religion and psychiatry have to offer in their lectures, theories, dogmas and self-help books can only foreshadow what we come to experience in sharing each others' stories, in the heart to heart contact of living beings, It's not surprising that the greatest documents of faith and humanity are the stories of their lives and their experiences that our ancestors have left behind in their diaries and autobiographies and family histories.

#### **4. Starting is the Best Way to Get Started**

Augustine's experience is paradoxical. The best time to write is when you can't, when you don't feel like it, when it's not the right time, then it seems impossible. What Reason told him could be spelled out for us this way:

- If you don't know the answer, write about the problem.
- If you don't know the problem, write about how it feels not to know the problem, or what it's like not to be able to write.

- Pray or reflect about it, but pray or reflect about it in ink.
- Keep your hand moving and the rest of you will follow.

The words of Augustine that I have quoted in my own free translation earlier in this section were the beginning of a masterpiece. He did "write the prayer down" and went on to compose the rest of the *Soliloquies*, reflections and dialogs that speak as loudly today as then.

You and I are the potential masterpieces of the present. Whether we, our stories in life or in writing achieve renown or not is of little importance. That we will have used our intelligence with reflection and compassion for both ourselves and our world is the issue. Therefore I ask you to pick up your pens and reflect with me. Ω

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An address to the International Mensa Gathering in Auckland, NZ by George Simons ([www.diversophy.com](http://www.diversophy.com))