

"Illumination!... Oh Great Mystery Revealed!"

From Chapter 3 of Catalytic Thinking

By the title of this book I may have given you the impression that there was some great mystery resolved that led to the creation of this process. "From wild bird seed comes a Midlife Epiphany" conjures up the image of some divine intervention, as if lightning struck me, leaving me a different, more clairvoyant person. For those of you hoping, and perhaps needing to hear a scenario like this, well here it is...

It was an eerie late autumn afternoon on the barrier beach near a confluence of water called "the Gut"...the farthest point by over-sand vehicle on the eastern tip of Martha's Vineyard. It was eerie because a panoramic view of the horizon showed both of our most influential heavenly bodies, the sun and full moon. A look towards the island revealed the still-warm, fiery orb that, combined with temperature changes, activates the instinctual clock in every single living thing in the area as if to scream "your time is running out this year...get what you need and get going!"

A look over the water, toward Cape Cod, startled eyes and logic with the sight of the other celestial body, almost as large and nearly the same color, just hovering above the water. This one could be called "The Great Emphasizer," as its influence every 28 days bolds and underscores the sun's message by pulling the water to its greatest heights, covering parts of the beach not reached since the previous winter's storms. These prolonged and deepened high tides allow game fish both the extra time and depth of water to charge into the shallows to gorge on the trapped schools of baitfish. "The Great Emphasizer," the late autumn full moon, creates a most abundant buffet spread for the stripers, bluefish, bonito and false albacore that I was seeking with my nine-weight fly rod, inciting them into a frenzied feeding pattern.

It never fails to give me the greatest sense of urgency I have ever felt -- I imagine it is a feeling parallel to that running through the marauding stripers. As if that weren't enough, "The Great Emphasizer" pulls double-duty a long six hours later, and almost with a bit of sarcasm it strips the water on the ebb tide to such low depths it lays bare the bottom of the ocean. You'd swear that lakes must be overflowing somewhere else in the world, as you imagine the moon saying "That was just in case you thought the sun and I were kidding...go on...get out of here!" It gives you the feeling that you've forgotten something, not just this day, but in

your lifetime. Everything is a celebration of the present moment because it will all be gone in one quick change of the wind. Everything is rushed, and fills you with the hope that you are truly prepared. Now, there will be no second chance.

I stood watching what I believed to be the last school of stripers, just out of reach of my cast, heading further away. Another season ending -- the incredible feeling of emptiness is palpable. Another cycle is almost completed. Unaware of my own actions, I found myself on the roof of my '77 Toyota Landcruiser... (you know, the one with a map of the Vineyard beaches shelacked to the interior roof and covered with pictures of past fishing seasons... right, the blue one.) Flyrod draped down on the hood like a military presentation of arms, I was sitting cross-legged with two fist-fulls of birdseed pulled from a huge bag in the back of the Landcruiser. Why? Probably because my hands needed to act out physically what my mind could only urge...*grasp something amid everything fleeting.* I held arms outstretched, one fist just above and windward of each heavenly body, letting birdseed sift through my fingers so it combined with wind and gravity to cross each the sun and moon, providing what seemed like a filter. Looking at the seed pass before the sun's waning orange glow, then turning to see the seeds passing through the moon's cold yellow backdrop. This filtering lens seemed to be able to decipher the dual message in the singular act of autumn turning to winter.

A season ends, causing as much reflection about the "all" as it does about the moment...the totality as if it were being handed in as is.

Your mind wanders, and wonders: "*Did I bring...?*" "*Do I have...?*" "*Did I lock the...?*" "*Did I turn off the...?*" If you have read Sebastian Junger's chilling account in The Perfect Storm, of one's brain's efforts to function as oxygen is deprived while drowning, you'd know that the thoughts that run through your mind in the final moments are as inane as those above. They are not the soul-searching ones you'd expect. This only added to my present sense of erieness. There on the beach my mind seemed to be working in the same pattern, but with more time and more oxygen. The closing of a season brings the completing of another cycle. One's brain shifts metaphors to also ask: "*What if I had...?*" "*Did I say good bye to...?*" "*Was I a good...?*"

In that moment, when stillness and timelessness offered the most crystal clear view of cathartic, hurried change...that's when it hit me.

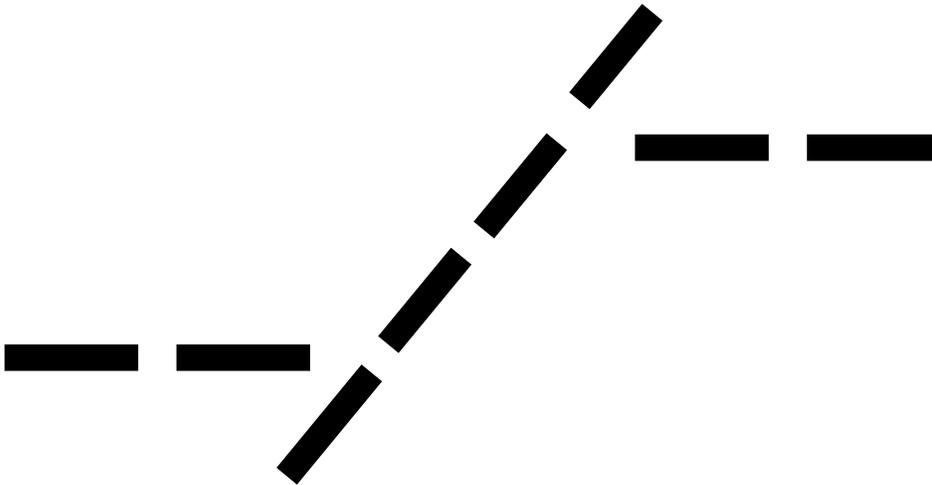
I am told that I bellowed "*Illumination! Oh great mystery revealed!*" just before falling backwards off the Landcruiser onto a big rock.

What I remember, upon waking next day at the Martha's Vineyard Hospital with bandages on my head, was first a feeling of dizziness, then the strange feeling that there was something I was supposed to remember. After life was pumped back into me by virtue of coffee brought fresh from the Dock Street Coffee Shop, my buddies enjoyed making sport of my plight. I wasn't laughing as much as they, not because of the pounding in my head, but because of that strange feeling.

What was I supposed to remember?

After they left, when I could again focus on something for more than ten seconds, I noticed paper next to my bed covered with drawings and my illegible handwriting.

I saw, drawn by my own hand, this diagram...as an explanation for
how breakthrough ideas are formed.





Could this be the perfect place for divine creative inspiration?

In a way I wish it happened like that. As a fisherman, I know the beauty of a really good story, one that has enough wild facts in it so it can more easily disguise the exaggerations and outright fabrications that must inevitably find their way in.

But I am, and you are too, fortunate that the story of how Catalytic Thinking was formed didn't happen that way. I'm fortunate because I would have missed discovering the capacity for self-awareness that I now have from years of pondering the creative process and my involvement with it. You are fortunate because what I will lay out for you in this book is more instructive, and a lot less painful, than a good whack on the noggin.