

This is a preprint of an article whose final and definitive form has been published in the Psychological Perspectives, 2016 © Copyright C.G. Jung Institute of Los Angeles. The published version is available online at:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00332925.2016.1134218>

SUMMER ENDS

by
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It's the tail end of summer, a liminal time like dusk and dawn when things are neither one thing nor the other, but for an instant, both at once. The air is still and breathless, our brains sluggish and limp, the simplest tasks beyond us. We steal a moment on the porch, my son and I, calling a halt to our quick pace even through the summer doldrums. We stand transfixed by butterflies: racing, playing, dancing. Black wings with a creamy edge, like pale silk binding on a velvet blanket, they romp in ones, twos, threes, now four, then back to two. Soaring together, crossing over, then side by side, under and over: a quadrille at breakneck speed. Their dance is instinctual, a playing out of the wonder of wings. Do they hold a flicker of memory somewhere in their aerial bodies of their wingless, earthbound earlier life?

Butterflies are drawn to our Santa Monica garden by blooming buddleia, rightly called butterfly bush, a small-scale purple echo of the jacaranda burst of summer's beginnings. Our fig tree in the front gracefully flaunts her bounty: dark purple fruits, the color of a queen's robe, ripen wave after wave, satisfying birds and butterflies as well as people. In the backyard, deep purple grapes hang heavy on the vine, already too far gone

for jelly-making. The idea, itself--cauldrons of simmering berries, melted wax, jars with lids that seal--is a throwback to a simpler, slower life in a simpler, slower time.

I long to sit undisturbed in a never-ending moment, soaking in these last languorous drops of summer, relishing the placid dreaminess remaining in this season of intense heat and overripe fruit.

But in this liminal place, which is neither one thing nor another but both at once—like the edge of a habitat, the place where two habitats meet, blend and merge, however briefly—there comes an ever-so-slight shifting of the currents. The paperwork for school arrives, piercing our late-summer indolence and demanding attention. Onerous as it is for the summer mind to grasp the necessity and act, here it is, the promise—and foreboding—of change on the horizon.

School will soon begin; a truth that requires emotional and practical preparations. Caring for the middle-school psyche is no small matter. It's like trying to hold a space for those dancing butterflies; like trying to contain a force of nature, a hurricane or twister; like witnessing the launch of a space shuttle, having worked hard to prepare it for the launch, then holding your breath, watching and praying that it finds its orbit safely.

The unconscious beckons, summons my attention, a few days after we witness the dance of the butterflies: *I dream of three women garbed in long black robes, levitating—airborne, like those dancing butterflies—while I look on in amazement. In the dream I wonder what could possibly be supporting them?*

For a second time, I am drawn to notice what's hovering mid-air.

We make it through the day by the sheer dint of Mother Nature, in Her nourishing, benign mode, operating inside and around us, supporting our going-on-being. The gift of psyche makes life possible. Yet much of the time we do not notice or consider what sustains us, what holds it all together.

A sacred energy is there, supporting the world, speaking to us nightly in our dreams; a manifestation of the substance that binds.

At least for a moment, I notice.

A few days later, the winds have turned. A brisk edge, an energy rather than actual coolness, has surmounted the dense torpor. At first it is just a whisper, a trace of liveliness mixed with the heavy slowness. With time, it gathers force.

School begins. I walk my son onto the schoolyard, the first day of seventh grade. Wordlessly, he signals me away. He will take it from here.

As I leave, I see sixth graders and their parents, new to middle school—their familial terror a nearly visible force radiating from their intimate groupings. From my experienced vantage point, this is touching, but evokes only a faint recollection. The proud parent of a 7th grader, I am momentarily convinced there is nothing here to fear. I have already forgotten my anxieties of the night before—much less those of an entire year ago—borrowed from my son. All night long, I was aware of the First-Day-of-School looming. My son and I shared the anxiety as if it were too much for him to bear alone. In

the light of morning on the school grounds, he assumes the burden. It is his to carry.

By now, the energy shift is clear and pure. The summer doldrums linger merely in our dragging feet and wistful longings. We must be mindful of the pace, and allow the new beginnings to open out gently. We need to anchor ourselves so we are not swept away by the force of the tumultuous, crowded days, brimming with the new. The strong stiff winds—even when they are warm Santa Anas—carry the pushy energies and unbounded expectations of the fall.

Like the butterflies, we need to heed the call and move in harmony with the deep, instinctual forces. Our efforts to align ourselves with that which truly sustains, are the efforts our souls rise up to meet. May we come to know the current that supports the butterflies and lifts the ancient feminine. May we bend to its flow.

May we notice.