

## **The Bat**

**By CC**

The bat image came to me as I lay on a massage table during a session of craniosacral therapy last spring. I had been struggling with bursitis and Will, the craniosacral therapist, was focusing intensely on my left hip where the pain was most acute. As his hands put gentle pressure on my left hip from above and below, I saw a bat hanging upside down in a cave, staring at me with its large yellow eyes. The cave was pitch black, which meant I could also see in the dark, and the bat opened its wings but did not take flight. I stared back at the bat, meeting its intent gaze. I felt calm and relaxed in my body and comfortable in the dark with the bat. I was curious about who she was and why she had come to me. I had never been up close to a bat before. The only time I had thought of bats was when driving up the S through the Central Valley and observing the roost sites on bridges and highway overpasses.

Who was this bat, and why had she come to me now? And why did she look at me so intently? At the time I had just completed my application for the analyst training program and had been caring for my sick mother for a few months. I was feeling in between things, neither here nor there. I spent time meditating on the bat and writing and painting about my encounter. I researched bats and their symbolism. I kept re-

reading how bats have long symbolized death and rebirth as they emerge from and retreat to the deepest parts of the earth. I asked myself, what wanted or needed to die in my life and what wanted to be born? Could I sit in the dark with the bat and live into the answer?

Mother bats and their babies are extremely attuned to each other. They can find each other easily in a nursery cave of millions by recognizing each other's high-pitched squeaks. Vampire bats are very nurturing and are known to regurgitate blood for injured bats and orphaned pups. In addition, in Asia the bat represents the maternal aspect of the great goddess. This characteristic of the bat made me think of my own experience of attunement and good mothering in my long analysis, things I didn't even know that I wanted or needed. I had stumbled into analysis when I had three young kids under the age of five years old and I felt overwhelmed by motherhood. I didn't see myself as an orphan because I had physical parents but I soon learned that I was an emotional orphan. In my analysis, I confronted the pain of a chaotic, distracted mother and also experienced the steadiness of secure attachment to my analyst. Through the transference, I was able to feel both the terror and the love which led to a profound healing. When I was asked to work with an analyst at the institute during the admissions process, I initially balked. I couldn't imagine leaving my analyst. Why would I leave such a good thing?

I returned to my bat reverie image again. What would it mean to take a new perspective on the prospect of leaving my analyst, like the bat does hanging upside down? The mother bat even gives birth and nurses upside down. How can I see in the dark and use my other senses to navigate? I allowed myself to consider leaving my

analyst and have curiosity about what that would be like. How does one end a 19-year analysis? I wasn't sure. I was willing to sit in the dark with it and explore. I felt both the sadness and fear of leaving and the excitement of working with somebody new. I also, importantly, acknowledged that I was curious about working with a male analyst. I began to meet with analysts and opened myself up to connecting in different ways with different people. Each trial session was wildly different and I deferred to my intuition to guide me through the uncharted territory.

Without realizing it, I was beginning to live into my earlier questions about what wanted or needed to die and what wanted to be born. The bat's symbolism of death and rebirth took on an amplified meaning for me. I felt it applied directly to my emerging desire to leave my long-time analyst and work with a new male analyst from the institute. The energy of my search for a new analyst took on the energy of a swarm of bats emerging from the cave or tree at dusk. I felt energized, curious and motivated while also holding the sorrow and trepidation about leaving my analyst. I was able to hold the juxtaposition of opposite feelings with a steady gaze, just like I was able to hold the gaze of the upside-down bat in my reverie.

This fall, six months after the bat image reverie on the massage table, I encountered a bat for the first time at dusk as I returned to my house from my office. It flew from under the eaves of the house toward the trees in the backyard. It swooshed past me silently. I felt I had been visited by a messenger from my unconscious. I felt a shift inside of me after the encounter. Soon thereafter, I made the formal decision to leave my analyst and chose someone new to work with. As I now prepare to make this transition, I am struck by the reverie image of the bat with its wings unfolded as if ready

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for flight. I feel like I am looking at my Self embodied in the bat, ready to take flight into the night of the unknown journey. The journey, like the bat, promises potential, awakening and feminine energy. The ending of the old analysis - the death, and the beginning of the new analysis - the rebirth, will happen in the landscape of the unconscious, the territory of the bat. I am ready to navigate the journey with all my senses on board.

