

the hardest part, and the deep that is too often not taken.

People often ask how a dialogue with images and emotions of the unconscious can lead to an ethical demand in life. A simple illustration follows. Because this did happen simply and rapidly, it is easier to describe than most pieces of active imagination, which are usually slower, deeper, and harder to grasp.

At a certain time in my life I had become profoundly exhausted, physically and emotionally, from doing more than my introverted nature could tolerate. I was at the end of my rope but did not know it. In this condition I made a collage. Getting to the first step of active imagination was no problem. I was already walking around in a half-conscious state that permitted unconscious contents to come through easily. From a large selection of pictures I rapidly chose some that appealed to a certain spot in my stomach, and pasted them to cardboard without thinking about what I was doing. Then I stood back and looked at it.

The central image was a young woman asleep in a hammock. The surrounding images were predominantly sad, dark, primitive women, children, animals, and people in introverted, prayerful, and self-reflective postures. As I looked at the collage, I descended into profound sadness and realized for the first time that I was exhausted. I saw that I had been ignoring my instincts, my femininity, my inner children, and my introverted nature. I knew that I should take time off from work and other obligations. Then the protests of the ego came in: I couldn't possibly do that, I was needed by my patients, I had many commitments for which I felt indispensable, and so on.

The depth at which these images touched me convinced me that I truly needed time in which to renew myself, but I did not take it. Within a few days I had developed a severe cold, which forced me to spend several days in bed, meeting the obligation to myself that I had not met voluntarily. In this case I had had the insight to draw the right ethical conclusion, but had failed to carry it out. Then life took care of the fourth step for me.