

About Transference



Guest post by Alice Miller.

At the beginning of our lives we were, as very small children, totally dependent on our parents. And we believed, we HAD TO believe, that we were loved by them. Even when we were abused we couldn't realize this. Then, after 4 years, we grew up and couldn't avoid suffering from being rejected, hated and treated cruelly. But as dependent children we still could not afford to FEEL this suffering, we were too small to deal with these feelings, thus we had to repress our rage, indignation, and our deep disappointment into our bodies. When we become adult, these repressed feelings stemming from the cruel treatment of our parents may come to the surface, but they are still connected with the small child's fear of being punished for every sign of rebellion.

Should we as adults be treated in the same way as our parents treated us as children, many of us – especially if we have been through therapy – can become aware of the cruelty endured before. But the knowledge of the whole amount of cruelty can still rest repressed because the terror happened when we had not yet a name for it. For this reason we need what we call “the transference”, hating for instance another person instead of our mother or father.

The transference is unavoidable if we were once abused children. It can also be highly confusing. But it can be liberating as well if we are ready to see it as a consequence of our early life. If we have summoned the courage to look our outraged, hateful YOUNG parents in the eyes, and to feel the fear of the small child we once were, then the misleading, confusing and defensive role of the transference disappears. We can then strive to feel the fear of the small baby, scared to death by the two big human beings holding our body and soul in their hands and doing or saying to us whatever they wanted, totally careless about our future, about what consequences their abuse might have on our lives. They acted like robots, directed by their own childhoods, unable of any kind of reflection whatsoever.

If we don't want to become like them we must strive to SEE them as exactly as possible. We can use in this way the transference as a means for discovering the feelings of the small child that we once were and to deepen our understanding for him or her. At this moment the transference becomes our guide that will enable the small child in us to BELIEVE what their body KNEW it's whole life but his mind could never believe: that so much evil and hatred can be directed towards a small, innocent child only because the parents have endured the same and have never questioned this.