

Psychotherapy Guidebook



# AJASE COMPLEX



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e-Book 2016 International Psychotherapy Institute

From *The Psychotherapy Guidebook* edited by Richie Herink and Paul R. Herink

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## Table of Contents

[DEFINITION](#)

[HISTORY](#)

[TECHNIQUE](#)

[APPLICATIONS](#)

# Ajase Complex

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## DEFINITION

The Ajase Complex stems from an original theory by Dr. Heisaku Kosawa (1897 — 1968), considered the pioneer of psychoanalysis in Japan. As Freud found the basis for the Oedipus complex in Greek mythology, so Kosawa found the legendary background for the Ajase Complex in a parable from the ancient Buddhist scriptures — specifically, in the tale of Ajase, revolving around the Buddhist precept of reincarnation.

In the time of Buddha, so the legend goes, a childless queen (Idaike), fearing the eventual loss of her husband's (King Binbashara) love as her beauty faded, longed to have a son as a means of securing the king's love for as long as she lived. Hearing of her desire, a prophet told her that, within three years, a mountain hermit would die a natural death and start his life afresh to become her son. However, the impatient queen elected to kill the hermit before the three years had passed. Soon, as the prophet had said, she conceived and gave birth to a boy (Ajase).

Ajase reached manhood and one day, during a bout of melancholy, he

was told by one of Buddha's enemies (Daibadatta) that his birth had sprung out of a fatality. Although the cause of his melancholy was ascribed by Daibadatta to "your mother's evil deed," Ajase initially reacted against his father, feeling sympathy for his mother's agony and anger against the one who had so distressed her. He helped unseat his father, then had him imprisoned and deprived of all sustenance. But Ajase soon learned that his mother was surreptitiously feeding his father honey, which saved him from starvation. The son then became so angry with his mother that he made a move to kill her, but was dissuaded from this act by a minister. At that moment, Ajase was attacked by a severe guilt feeling and became afflicted with a dreadful skin disease characterized by so offensive an odor that no one dared approach him. Only his mother stood by and lovingly nursed him back to health.

Forgiven by the mother he had intended to slay, Ajase was awakened to a real love for her and discarded his grudge against her. His mother, in turn, was able to develop a natural maternal affection for her son beyond original self-centered attachment to him.

Ajase was beset by a dual guilt feeling: the initial violent guilt manifesting itself in the skin disease, which was really a desire to inflict self-punishment for wanting to take his mother's life, and a subsequent tender sense of guilt — so prevalent among Japanese — resulting from his mother's

pure act of forgiveness.

Kosawa cited the mother's female egoism as the factor causing the child's aggression against her. Thus, the Ajase Complex refers to a child's resentment against his mother's female sexual drive toward, and desire to be loved by, his father, together with the guilt feeling stemming from this matricidal impulse.

## HISTORY

This theory was first presented to Sigmund Freud in July 1932, during Kosawa's studies at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute in a paper entitled "Two Kinds of Guilt Feelings (Ajase Complex)."

## TECHNIQUE

In his paper, Kosawa discussed the psychological peculiarity of the Japanese, as evidenced by their acceptance of oral dependency toward the mother, and repression of the hatred and resentment of the mother that accompanies this tendency. In the case of psychoanalytical therapy for Japanese patients, the mother transference (the emotional attitude the patient has toward the therapist, who serves as a mother substitute) conflict with the therapist appears at a comparatively early stage, while therapeutic regression to an oral-ambivalent state takes place easily, particularly when

compared with the process of psychoanalytic therapy for Western patients. Parallel to this psychic process, the patient experiences the feeling, peculiar to Japanese, of “being aggressive and yet being forgiven,” from which develops a “guilt feeling over being forgiven and a need to make restitution for having harbored an evil intent.” This Japanese type of guilt feeling is quite different, Kosawa states, from the “guilt feeling of castration anxiety, fear of punishment,” which Freud embodied in his theory of the Oedipus complex.

## APPLICATIONS

On the basis of the Ajase theory, Kosawa advocated that, when treating cases of mother transference, the psychoanalytic therapist keep Ajase’s mother’s mental attitude continuously in mind — e.g., loving her child and forgiving his aggression against herself. The therapist should manifest to the patient the latter’s negative transference in identifying his mother with the therapist. Through the patient’s experience of being forgiven for his aggression — originally directed against his mother and now transferred to the therapist — he becomes free from the above conflict and develops the core of a healthy ego. In Kosawa’s psychotherapy, patients, through the feeling of togetherness with the therapist — who both forgives the patient and accepts the thrust of the patient’s aggression against him — experience feelings of fusion with their mothers and thus become capable of developing a basic trust in society.