

Presencing Newsletter Issue 16 Lifting the Mask: Closed Faces - Open Faces

The great American president Abraham Lincoln once said that when we reach middle age our faces become open or closed. What he observed was that persons who had open faces embraced their lives. They were capable of many facial expressions: love, sadness, curiosity, alertness, and compassion.



Those persons who distrusted their lives acquired closed faces. Closed faces have a kind of hardness of expression. The muscles of the face have adjusted themselves to a chronic life condition; perhaps the person has much pain, fear, anger, distrust. Like a plaster cast when it hardens over an injury, closed faces can be emotionally protective. The open face is expressive and reflective; the closed face is often withdrawn and protective.



It requires some effort for the hardened muscles of closed faces to change their tone so that other expressions are possible. This closed face can also happen when one receives a facelift. To look younger the wrinkled skin has been selectively tightened... limiting the range of facial expressions.

Botox treatments are used to relax muscles that are overly tight. But then clients can have difficulty activating the muscles that have been suppressed. These "masks of youth" are also less capable of expressiveness. Bodyworkers and estheticians can feel this manmade control of normal tissue response. In my experience, human touch and client feeling-awareness can help return closed faces to their normal resting tone, natural beauty, and open expressiveness.

Faces are mirrors. Open faces are capable of mirroring others. This mirroring is the source of true beauty. It is important that estheticians' faces are expressive mirrors of beauty for their clients, rather than closed "masks of youth." We need to polish the mirrors of our faces so that we accurately reflect the person who is hiding beneath the protective mask. When the closed face expresses fear and pain and we feel compassion for the person's suffering, our reflection can help loosen the protective mask.



Also if we help a person to accurately feel her facial tissue from inside, she will feel the mask start to dissolve. There are certain muscle groups that can be worked with. First and foremost are the biting and chewing muscles. The Chinese I Ching hexagram "biting through" means to tackle a great problem with will power.

The person with a closed face is biting down on the problems of her life. Perhaps she feels disregarded; perhaps she feels old and unattractive; perhaps she has many worries. When we recognize that the person is biting down to control her emotions and limit her actions, we can loosen the muscles of chewing that strongly influence the other facial muscles.



So we bring the client's awareness into the three major muscles of chewing: masseters, pterygoids, and temporalis; also certain neck muscles: sublingual, sternocleidomastoid, scalenes. When these muscles are relaxed the esthetician and bodyworker will see on the face how much has been accomplished. Using client awareness, these muscle groups can be relaxed without pain, mechanical

pressure or invasive injections. And the client will release the burden of wearing a protective mask.

Before we use therapies and preparations for the skin care it is important that we release the painful or numbing effects of these major muscles. Just as we reflect the person underneath the mask with our words and facial expressions, we can teach the person to become conscious of the feeling of open facial expressiveness and beauty. This produces a very good feeling inside the body, relaxes the client, and creates a freeing effect on the muscles and joints. The freeing of the other facial muscles is usually easy after this action.

We also need to bring the clients' awareness into the temporal mandibular joint, which often serves as a lock on the chewing muscles. Not only does this bring relaxation to the face but to the upper body as well. Thus the person can feel more freedom of expression throughout the upper body: arms, neck, face shoulders and even voice.

People who are older respond quite well to this kind of esthetics approach. They want to feel beautiful inside and expressive outside. Please give them this chance. It will not only help them let go of the heavy mask they are wearing. They will find themselves much more appreciative of their lives.



"Beauty before me, beauty behind me, beauty all around me... let me walk in beauty... let it be beautiful when I sing my last song." ~Native American prayer

