



MASKS, SELF-AWARENESS AND ART THERAPY

We all have masks we don in social settings, public spaces, relationships and various occasions. This is normal behavior for most people, but we run the risk of forgetting who **our truest selves are**. Purim is dedicated to discovering what lies beneath the masks we wear. When we look at the story of Purim, we can see themes of unmasking: stepping into our true identities, accepting things about ourselves we haven't been able to accept and allowing for great change.

In the story, Queen Esther has something she is ashamed of — her Jewish identity. But once she embraces that part of herself, she is able to save her people.

Masks can cover up the difficulties people in our communities may be struggling with and refusing to accept. One such mask — or challenge — many people hide behind is their mental health. One in five adults in the United States has struggled with their mental health ([NAMI](#)), and it is safe to assume someone within your circle of loved ones or in your larger community has too. Although studies show therapy and treatment can be quite effective, too many people do not get help because of the stigma.

We can use the story of Purim as a way to discuss mental health and express our truest selves as well as to create space where others feel safe to share and receive support.



We wear masks to be socially acceptable, to hide feelings of fear or insecurity, to hide depression or pain, or simply so people will like us. Masks aren't a "bad thing," but we can't lose ourselves in them, nor should we feel obligated to hide our identities and lived experiences. Being aware of when and why we are donning a mask and feeling safe enough to take it off, is an important part of our mental health and wellness.



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Activity

Mask making is a traditional part of expressive [art therapy](#), a mental health treatment that uses visual arts, theater, music, movement and many other techniques in conjunction with clinical methodologies. It can help people express those thoughts, feelings and experiences that may be difficult to speak about. Art therapy has been shown to help significantly with symptoms related to depression, anxiety and trauma and to increase positive coping, self-esteem and cognition. ([National Center for Biotechnology Center](#))

Please print and cut out the mask and eyes for the following activity.

Mask number 1: Be like Esther, and use the front of the mask to depict how you believe others see you. Decorate it with drawings, symbols and words. On the inside of the mask, depict how you would like for them to see you, especially in ways that differ from the front of the mask. Again, you may illustrate your true self any way you like – with pictures, poetry, colors, words/slogans/phrases, etc.

Mask number 2: Create a kavanah, or deeply personal intention. On the back of the mask, draw or write your strengths – what is wonderful inside of you that perhaps the world has yet to see. Decorate the front of the mask with words or pictures depicting how you would like to live the next year.

Questions for discussion

- What or who influences how you see yourself at any given time?
- Do you feel you ever wear anything (like a mask) to hide something?
- How do you feel when you are wearing one of those masks?
- How difficult is it to be yourself in your community?
- What makes it hard or easy?
- Just as Mordechai encourages Esther, are there people in your life who have encouraged you to express your true self?





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