



I believe all of us wear a mask of some kind that covers varying degrees of our true selves from others. Before we condemn or even judge others in any way, we need to remove our own masks, become vulnerable and experience the fear others feel on a regular basis. I think if we do that the tendency to judge and condemn and drive others away will disappear

The mask that each of us wear on any given day; at any given moment varies for all of us. We may have assumed the mask over a period of time or they may be an identity that was given to us. We all put a mask on when we're afraid. We all drew an imaginary circle around our hearts and dared anyone to come too close.

This mask is the image of ourselves that we present to others. It is our false identity that was developed in response to an unsafe and demanding environment, out of fear. We have different reasons for using this type of mask. We may want to protect ourselves from getting hurt or rejected by others. We may want to become what others want us to be, in order to be accepted by them. Perhaps we feel no one would like or love who we truly are, so we hide who we truly are. Or we might not like ourselves so we try to pretend to be like someone else.

I think the basic issue is not feeling loved by others and ourselves. This seems to fuel our insecurities and fears and we may find ourselves willing to do anything to be loved by others. Even denying who we are - our beliefs, our values, our desires, our needs. If we don't love ourselves, then we depend on others to provide that love and make us feel worthwhile. Yet, they may look to us to provide the same thing! That makes for a very unstable foundation for our relationships .

Coping mechanisms, like pleasing others, are based on insecurities. We seem to develop our mask as a way to handle our fear of rejection and other painful feelings. Those who wear masks on Halloween are in disguise - pretending to be something or somebody else, but they know its a game of pretend. If we are aware of our masks then we know we are not what we pretend to be. But many are not aware of the mask that they present to others.

We all tried to keep the world from us, never pausing to consider that by doing so we also kept us from the world. This creates and keeps us in a state of isolation, and that can be deadly. This is no more prevalent than when working with individuals that have a substance abuse issue. They are masters at wearing multiple masks, to manipulate, and to keep others from seeing them for who they really are. But this works against them, because they become lost behind their own mask and their mask keeps them in a state of denial. It prevents them from gaining the much needed help from others and even keeps from them seeing their own need for help.

Using mask is not always negative, however. They can give us confidence and power, or at least the illusion of power, in a time when we may feel powerless. As long as the masks remain flexible and breakable, we can alter them at will, but we be aware that we are not what we present to others.

As long as we recognize that what we wear is a mask we all are right. But when the mask becomes our perceived reality for us, then our troubles begin. We confuse the mask with the person, and if we are great actors, so do those around us. Gradually the mask becomes a trap, and we become the mask. When we wear our own masks, we often don't realize that we are wearing a mask at all.

So, what kind of masks do we wear? I would say that our mask changes to meet the demands of our surroundings. Our mask or false identity depends on our external perspective and our real identity relies on our internal perspective. Our mask reacts to the demands of our environment and our true identity responds to our needs and desires. There are many different masks or coping mechanisms we take on. We may push ourselves to be perfect in how we look and/or how we act. We may deny our feelings of sadness or anger or fear, because we may have learned these feelings are bad or unimportant. We may feel we must always be right, good or knowledgeable. We can feel we have to care for everyone else to be loved and needed. Maybe we think we exist only to make others happy. These are just some of the masks we may wear. Most people wear multiple mask switching in and out of characters on a constant basis.

It is not necessary to get rid of the mask to allow the true self to be seen. Actually we may need both to live in this world and as our world becomes safer then the need and purpose for wearing our mask becomes less and less.. We need to maintain a balance between the two - allowing our fears, dreams, and hopes to be shared with others, while protecting it from those that cannot appreciate it or wish to capitalize on it. Our masks are not bad, but it just comes down to choice. The real you has choices of how to be, but the person in the mask depends on others for how it should be. The person behind the mask seeks validation from others and often will do whatever they deem necessary to obtain that validation.

How do we find a balance? Some ways are to explore your inner depths, and learn more about the true and false you. Begin to distinguish between the two, and discover all you can about yourself - not only your good qualities, but also your bad qualities. You must explore your dark side and find healthy ways to express what you find in the shadows. Work to appreciate and accept your qualities, your style, your strengths and your weaknesses. Allow the real you to come to the surface while still acknowledging the need for your protective mask at times.

Allowing your true self to come forth is scary because do so risks rejection, take small steps in your risk taking to feel safer. Some may have so much pain and anger from past rejections or betrayals that we may need professional help. Don't let your mask suffocate who you really are, but rather use it to create safety and security so the rest of the world can enjoy the real you.

What kind of mask are you wearing today? What are some expectations you put on yourself or false concepts you have of yourself? Do you think you have to or should or must do or say or be a certain way to be loved and accepted by others?

A mask might let words through, but it hides the important things. If we can't be true to ourselves then we deny our expression, our soul, and we even deny ourselves. I believe that each of us is here to not only discover and accept our unique qualities, but also to share them with others. That is the healing process when we touch heart to heart. You can only find out what someone has up their sleeve when you become willing to rub shoulders with them.

It seems to me that we all have a choice to make. We can let the fear take us, or we could let God lead us. We could shut ourselves off from the world, or we could open ourselves to it. We could put on a mask, or we could put on our faith.

Credit: Michael Clark

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