



Purim: Reveal – Ask – Receive

The words Megillat Esther, translated as the Scroll of Esther, can also mean to reveal (megaleh) the hidden (haster). Esther is afraid to reveal her Jewish identity because she does not know how the king will react if she unveils this hidden aspect of herself. She realizes she could be rejected, even killed. However, with encouragement from her cousin Mordechai, she agrees to disclose her plight and the plight of the Jewish people. She asks the community to fast for her, and with that support, she gains the courage to advocate for herself even in an extremely difficult situation.

She bravely reveals her true identity to the king, asks for his support, and, because of the king's openness and compassion, she receives it.

Like Esther, many individuals with both visible and invisible disabilities, and their caregivers, keep their challenges hidden. Our culture has taught us to think of disability as a private and painful matter, rather than recognizing disability as one element of what it means to be human. In a society that conditions us to look past disability, try to "fix" it, or equate it with tragic suffering, it's easy to become afraid

of revealing our true selves. We may choose to hide integral aspects of ourselves or our lives if we feel it may alter others' opinion of us. Further, if we reveal our challenges and are met with disbelief ("it's all in your head"), minimization ("everything will be better soon"), excessive sympathy ("I am so sorry for you"), or condescension ("we all have our challenges"), we retreat and feel disconnected from community. However, if we reveal our challenges and are met with acknowledgement, understanding, kindness, and empathy, then we may be able to ask for the support we need.

How do we create a brave space for revealing?

- Listen and take the time to truly hear someone.
- Hold space for people to share their challenges without judgment.
- Allow for silences, without jumping to offer an answer or find a solution; do not provide unsolicited advice or suggestions.
- Demonstrate care by remaining present, even when it feels uncomfortable.
- Check our own feelings about disability, including preconceived notions, fears, beliefs about the cause of disability, and/or our desire to “fix” someone.
- Build familiarity over time.

How do we make asking for support, without stigma or shame, a community norm?

- Recognize that we are interdependent and will all need support at some point.
- Create opportunities for everyone (clergy, staff, volunteers, community members) to share what their needs for support may be.
- Ensure multiple access points for asking for support – e.g., initial intake meeting, membership forms, link on website and/or in e-newsletters, a support box (like a suggestion box).
- Communicate regularly about the community’s desire to understand both the immediate and longer-term needs of members.

How do we make offering and receiving support part of our community culture?

- Start or revitalize a Chesed or Caring Committee to address both short (surgery, illness, accident, loss) and long-term needs (chronic conditions, mental illness, lifelong disabilities) of individuals and caregivers.
- Ask individuals and caregivers how the community could make their life easier or better.
- Create support groups for those with similar experiences.

Sometimes people feel like they have used up their quota of care or assistance. However, if we establish brave spaces for revealing, avenues for comfortably asking for support, and systems for meeting needs, we will create communities of care that truly are a circle of support for our members.

