

Natural Purim Masks

Battle Of The Beards

*The
International
Beard
Contest
and Other
Curious
Contests
that Really
Happen*



In the spirit of Purim, Zman brings you a collection of funny-but-true contests which actually take place. If you ever wondered about such vitally important facts like which country boasts the world beard champion, who participates in the festival hosted by the National Association of Tired People (NAP for short), who has the fastest lawn mower, who makes the oddest grimaces, who irons shirts in the weirdest places, who tosses cell phones the farthest, etc. then you have come to the right address.

• *Aviva Sternfeld*

For many, dressing up on Purim is a contest to see who can show the most originality or look the most convincing. Some people display an inborn talent at choosing just the right accessory to get the perfect effect or know just how to apply the right makeup to the face to complete the disguise. Beards and whiskers are an especially popular means of camouflaging one's true identity.

In fact, disguises are a major industry with many companies dedicated to producing masks—even custom masks made-to-order. As soon as a new politician becomes famous, someone produces a mask caricaturing his or her face. Every president is a source of business for these manufacturers.

This article, though, concentrates on a unique form of disguise that does not involve painting yourself or purchasing funny clothes. Above all, it does not require applying a fake beard or faux mustache. This disguise uses one's very own, naturally grown beard.

Beards in History

For the Jews, beards are nothing new. In the non-Jewish world, though, beards are relatively rare (Sikhs aside). It was not always that way, though. For example, beards were very popular during the 1850s and world leaders of that time all sported beards. These include Russia's Czar Alexander III, France's Napoleon III and Germany's Kaiser Frederick III. (As you may



Beards are among the most popular Purim accessories.

have noticed, "III's were also very popular around the world during the 1850s.)

There is even an anecdote involving an anti-Semitic Polish military commander who decreed that all Jews in his area had to shave off their beards. A renowned rabbi and activist in Warsaw, Avraham Tzvi Perlmutter, spoke to the commander to try to have the order rescinded. When the rabbi met the commander, who wore a beard himself, the rabbi asked him to look into a mirror. Then he told the army officer, "Commander, we both have long beards. Can you imagine how we would look if someone would remove them entirely?"

The commander roared with laughter. "My own wife wouldn't recognize me!"

That was it. The rabbi had gotten through. "So tell me, Commander, how can you order elderly Jews, fathers and grandfathers, to shave off their beards? When



Left to right: Kaiser Frederick III of Germany, Emperor Napoleon III of France, Czar Alexander III of Russia.

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