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Abstract: Presents biographical information on Golda Meir, who served as prime minister of Israel from 1969 through 1974. Role in the establishment of the state of Israel; Details of her childhood in czarist Russia; Immigration to the United States; Early interest in socialism and the Zionist movement; Membership in the Poalei Zion (Workers of Zion).

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Golda Meir

Background

Golda Meir served as prime minister of Israel from 1969 through 1974. She was one of the early Jewish settlers of the state of Palestine and played a pivotal role in the establishment of the state of Israel. Her appointment as prime minister was preceded by a distinguished political career during which she held several posts in the fledgling Israeli government.

Golda Meir was born Golda Mabovitch in Kiev, Ukraine on May 3, 1898. Her father, Moshe Mabovitch, was a skilled carpenter, but the family was poor. As a Jewish family in czarist Russia, the Mabovitchs were subject to discrimination and persecution. Hoping that his prospects of earning a living would be better in America, Moshe left his wife and three daughters behind and immigrated to the United States in 1903. He planned to return to Russia when he had earned enough money to support his family.

Meanwhile, Golda's mother, Blume Mabovitch, moved with her children to Pinsk, where her parents lived. Golda's older sister Sheyna became involved in radical politics. Worried that Sheyna's activities might put the family in danger, Mrs. Mabovitch decided to join her husband in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he worked as a railroad carpenter. Golda, her mother, and her sisters arrived in Milwaukee in spring 1906 after a difficult journey by rail and steamship.

Her mother opened a store below the family's small apartment, and Golda worked in the store in the mornings before school. She was an excellent student and showed a flair for

public speaking. She organized a group called the American Young Sister Society to raise money for classmates who could not afford to pay for their schoolbooks.

By the time she was ten years old, Golda had decided that she wanted to become a schoolteacher. Golda entered high school in 1912, but her mother did not approve of her daughter's plans to further her education, hoping that she would marry instead. Weary of her mother's criticism, Golda ran away from home to live with her sister and brother-in-law in Denver.

Interacting with the Jewish immigrant community there, she became interested in socialism and the Zionist movement, which sought to establish a homeland in Palestine for Jewish settlers.

After a short time, Golda returned to Milwaukee, where she graduated from North Division High School. At age 17, Golda joined the Poalei Zion (Workers of Zion) organization and planned to immigrate to Palestine. She graduated from the Milwaukee Teachers' Training College in 1917, but her interest in teaching declined as her involvement in the Zionist movement increased. Her fiancé, Morris Meyerson, was reluctant to leave the United States. He agreed to accompany Golda only after they were married, on December 24, 1917.

Political Career

In November 1917, the British government issued the Balfour Declaration, officially supporting the establishment of a Jewish settlement in Palestine. After World War I ended, the Meyersons and two other young couples moved from Milwaukee to New York City, sharing an apartment while they worked to save money for their voyage to Palestine.

The Meyersons finally reached Palestine in July 1921. They joined the Yishuv, a small community of Jewish settlers, and lived briefly in Tel Aviv before they were accepted as members of the Merhavia kibbutz, a collective farming community.

Golda's tasks at the kibbutz included baking bread, managing the chicken houses, and picking almonds. Through her hard work, she earned the respect of the other members of the kibbutz and was chosen as their delegate to the Histadrut, a labor federation that oversaw the activities of the trade unions and kibbutzim in Palestine. Because Morris was in poor health and found life on the kibbutz too physically demanding, he and Golda left Merhavia after a few years and returned to Tel Aviv, where Golda continued to work for the Histadrut.

When she became pregnant, Golda and her husband moved to Jerusalem. The couple's son, Menahem, was born in 1924, and their daughter Sarah was born in 1926.

Four years later, Golda resumed her political activity. She was appointed secretary of the Women's Labor Council, a division of the Histadrut, where she helped to set up training farms for young women so they could acquire agricultural skills. She also worked to establish communal childcare facilities for working mothers. After Arab riots broke out in 1929, Golda joined the Haganah, an underground army established for the protection of settlements and kibbutzim against attacks.

With her two young children, Golda returned to the United States in 1932 for a two-year assignment as National Secretary for Pioneer Women, the American counterpart of the Women's Labor Council. She was assigned to increase the group's membership and urge American women to support the Palestinian settlers.

In the years before World War II, there was a rapid influx of Jewish refugees into Palestine, causing problems such as housing shortages and unemployment. Meanwhile, tensions between the Jewish settlers and Arabs were escalating.

In 1936, Golda became responsible for the Histadrut's mutual aid program and was appointed as chairman of Kupat Holim (the Workers' Sick Fund), which provided medical services for the Jewish population in Palestine. In 1937, Golda was sent to the United States on a successful fund-raising mission for a proposed maritime project, including the construction of a port at Tel Aviv and purchase of fishing vessels.

In 1939, the British government released its White Paper on Palestine, which restricted the number of immigrants to Palestine to a maximum of 75,000 through March 31, 1944, and called for an end to immigration thereafter. Golda was among those who worked to circumvent the restrictions on Jewish immigration.

Due to her extensive travels and responsibilities, Golda spent a great deal of time away from her husband, but the couple never divorced. Morris Meyerson died in 1951.

[Prime Minister of Israel](#)

When Moshe Sharett, the head of the Jewish Agency's political department, was arrested in 1946, Golda replaced him, becoming the main liaison between the Jewish community in Palestine and the British government. Golda went to the United States on a fund-raising mission in January 1948 and succeeded in soliciting \$50 million in pledges, more than double the sum that she was expected to raise. The funds were used to secretly purchase arms from Europe.

Upon her return to Palestine, she was appointed by David Ben-Gurion as a member of the Provisional Government of Israel. When the State of Israel was established on May 14, 1948, Golda was one of the signers of its Proclamation of Independence. Shortly thereafter, she was appointed as Israel's ambassador to the Soviet Union and left for Moscow, serving for seven months in that position.

Golda was elected to the Knesset (Israel's legislature) in 1949, and served as Minister of Labor until 1956. During that time, she worked to increase the standard of living for Israeli citizens and built low-cost housing for immigrants. She introduced the first national insurance bill in the Knesset in 1952. After leaving the Minister of Labor post, Golda was appointed as Foreign Minister of Israel in 1956.

That year, at Prime Minister Ben-Gurion's insistence, Golda changed her last name to the Hebrew "Meir" ("to burn brightly"). She headed Israel's efforts to build ties with newly independent African nations by sending experts to provide assistance with agriculture, health care, and manufacturing. She resigned as Foreign Minister in 1966 and became secretary general of Israel's Mapai party, and later held the same position in the Labor Party.

Meir became the third woman in the world to serve as a country's prime minister in 1969, when she succeeded Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, who had died of a heart attack. Under her leadership, the Israeli economy thrived. One of the low points of Meir's term as Prime Minister came during the Yom Kippur War.

Syrian troops had begun to mobilize in the Golan Heights in September 1973, but Meir's military advisors assured her that an attack was not imminent. As a result, Meir hesitated to order a call for Israeli reserve troops before Syrian and Egyptian troops attacked Israel

on October 6, 1973. Israel suffered heavy losses during the Yom Kippur War, with over 2,500 casualties.

Meir regretted her failure to act in a timely manner and resigned as Prime Minister in 1974, despite her re-election to the office on December 31, 1973. She was replaced by Yitzhak Rabin. Golda Meir died on December, 8, 1978, after a long struggle with lymphoma, a form of cancer.

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By Patricia Martin

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