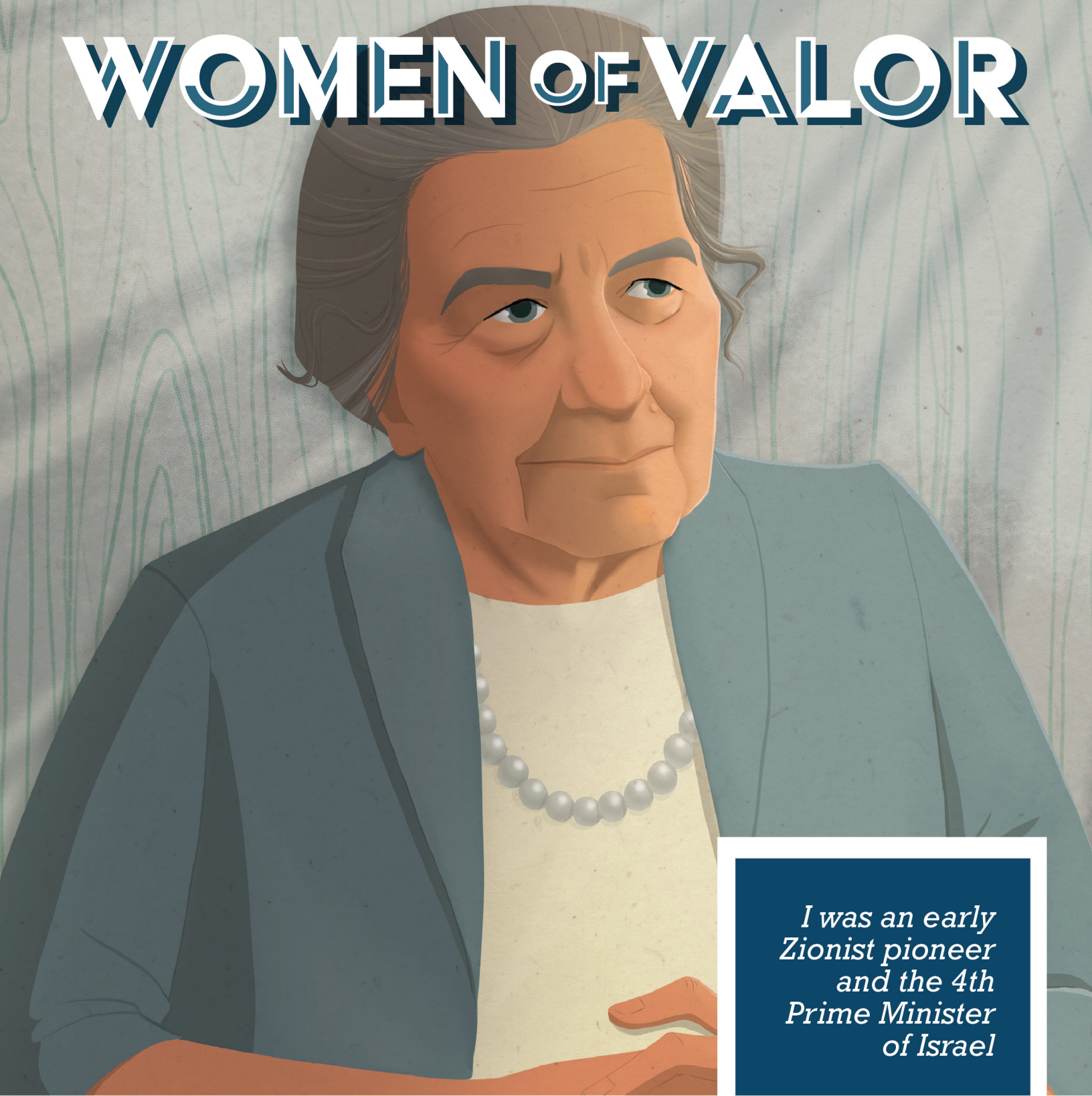


WOMEN OF VALOR



*I was an early
Zionist pioneer
and the 4th
Prime Minister
of Israel*

GOLDA MEIR

Meet Golda Meir

One of Golda Meir's earliest memories helped shape the **trajectory** of her life. As a young girl, she watched her father nail boards across the windows of their tiny home in Kiev when neighbors warned of a coming **pogrom**. Although her family was spared, Golda always remembered the gripping fear she felt waiting for the attack.

Inspired by her older sister Shayna's activism, Golda concluded that personal responsibility and action were required to make her beliefs a reality. As a young woman, she embraced the Zionist movement and devoted her life to the struggle for a Jewish nation, often at great personal sacrifice.

Golda's strong convictions initially led her to Palestine to help settle the land. Later, she became a leader in the struggle for an independent Jewish state, serving in key government positions and ultimately as Israel's fourth prime minister.



At-a-Glance

- ★ Born Goldie Mabovitch on May 3, 1898 in Kiev, Ukraine
- ★ A strong spokesperson for the **Zionist** cause
- ★ An early Zionist pioneer who helped develop and found the State of Israel
- ★ One of the signatories of Israel's independence declaration in 1948
- ★ Israel's fourth prime minister (1969–74) and the first woman to hold the post
- ★ Known for her unwavering commitment to her convictions, no matter the personal sacrifice
- ★ Died December 8, 1978 in Jerusalem, Israel

Young Golda

Golda was born one of Moshe and Bluma Mabovitch's eight children during a period of great unrest in Russia. The family was poor, hungry, and cold, and lived in constant fear of the Cossacks, the government's horse-mounted soldiers who terrorized villages in an effort to suppress **insurgents**.

Although Moshe's services as a master carpenter were in demand, he was rarely paid for his work because he was Jewish. Conditions became so harsh in Kiev that Moshe decided to emigrate to America. Unfortunately, he could only scrape together enough money for one ticket, so he went alone, promising to bring the entire Mabovitch family to America as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, Golda, her mother, and sisters relocated to the Jewish ghetto of Pinsk where they lived with her grandfather and worked in his tavern. At last, Golda had enough to eat, a comfortable place to live, and was surrounded by family. Yet, they still lived under constant fear of the Cossacks. In protest, Golda's older sister Shayna joined a secret Zionist movement and barely escaped arrest when her group was discovered by local authorities. Out of concern for Shayna's safety, Bluma insisted they immediately join Moshe in America.

Land of Opportunity

Golda and her family arrived in America in 1906, reuniting with her father in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Golda was mesmerized by the crowded streets, cars, and stores with an abundance of food and brightly colored clothing. She especially loved school, where she quickly made friends and excelled in her studies. She remembered learning the "Pledge of Allegiance" in just a few days, enunciating each word carefully, so as not to race through it as her classmates did. The final words – *with liberty and justice for all* – meant the most to her, especially after her experiences in Russia.

Over time, Golda's family became deeply involved in their community. They attended discussion groups, clubs, and political meetings. They hosted intellectuals, political figures, and recent immigrants at their weekly Sabbath meals. Golda was also expected to help out by working in the small grocery store her mother opened in the front room of their house.

No matter how many hours Golda worked in the store, she continued to excel at school and was named valedictorian of her eighth grade class. Golda dreamed of attending high school and becoming a teacher, creating tension with her mother, who didn't believe that girls should be educated. Bluma wished for Golda to marry young and was determined to find her a suitable husband. When Golda refused to marry, Bluma insisted that Golda quit school. Out of desperation, Golda ran away from home and joined her older sister Shayna in Denver, so she could continue her studies.





Seeds of Independence

Although Golda missed her parents, she was determined to follow her dreams. During her two years in Denver, Golda attended high school and became immersed in politics and philosophy. Shayna's friends talked of building a Jewish homeland in Palestine, sparking Golda's imagination. Her social life blossomed, but Golda was more interested in political causes than romance until she met a young man named Morris Meyerson.

Shayna felt responsible for her younger sister

and began to worry when Golda spent less time studying and more time staying out late. The sisters began to argue frequently, so much so that Golda decided to move out. To afford living on her own, Golda gave up school and worked full-time in a department store. Still, she found time to be involved in political causes, and followed reports of Jewish settlers moving to Palestine.

Moshe and Bluma were worried about Golda, so they invited her to return home and continue her studies.

"It isn't really important to decide when you are very young just exactly what you want to become when you grow up ... It is much more important to decide on the way you want to live."

Golda Meir

The Zionist Dream

Back in Milwaukee, Golda returned to high school. She also became involved with the Zionist political group Poale Zion, and volunteered to teach Jewish heritage at the group's school. She continued to correspond with Morris, though he disapproved of her desire to immigrate to Palestine. When World War I broke out in Europe, Golda's family helped Jewish soldiers by raising money for food and clothing for the war's victims.

News reached Wisconsin that pogroms were taking place in Poland and Ukraine, causing Golda to grow more politically active. She organized local rallies and gave persuasive pro-Zionist speeches. More than ever, Golda believed that the Jewish people needed their own homeland, and she was determined to make that dream a reality by moving to Palestine. Morris believed that Golda's dream was merely a fantasy until 1917, when the British announced the Balfour Declaration, signaling official support for a Jewish state.

Kibbutz Life

Morris finally agreed to accompany Golda to Palestine, and they were married in 1917. Over the next few years, the couple worked diligently to raise money for their passage. In the Spring of 1921, they bid tearful farewells to their families, knowing that they may never see them again.

After an arduous journey, they arrived in Palestine where they found a hot, dusty city, and encountered American immigrants who were returning home because of the challenging life that Palestine offered. Yet, the horrible conditions did not deter Golda from her dream of settling the rugged land.

Golda applied three times for membership in **Kibbutz** Merhavia, and was finally

accepted in the Fall of 1921. All members were required to work – clearing and converting swampland into fertile farmland. Despite the grueling labor, Golda was delighted to live in this communal environment, but Morris struggled with the lack of privacy and possessions.

Golda continued to be very vocal about Zionist politics and the kibbutz selected her to represent Merhavia at the kibbutz convention in 1922. Her impassioned speeches drew attention from Zionist party leaders including the Pioneer Women, a worldwide Jewish women’s welfare organization, who enlisted Golda to represent them in meetings with foreign dignitaries.



Major Changes

Due to Morris’s health issues, he and Golda resettled in Jerusalem and welcomed two children. Golda later admitted her struggle with leading a traditional domestic life, claiming that the four years they lived in Jerusalem were the most miserable she had ever experienced.

By chance, Golda ran into an old friend who offered her a job with the Women’s Labor Council. She gladly accepted the position even though it would require long hours, travel, and time away from home, marking a turning point in her life. She made the painful decision to separate from Morris and return to her longtime dream of actively building the Jewish state. She moved with her children to Tel Aviv, who also struggled with her long absences, highlighting the tension between the duty she felt for her country and her family obligations.

World War II

In 1933, Adolf Hitler rose to power and promised to rid Germany of the Jews, whom he blamed for all of Germany's problems. Within a few years, half of German Jews were fired from their jobs. Jewish homes and businesses were looted and reassigned to non-Jews. Many Jews were arrested and imprisoned. Because so many Jews wanted to leave Europe, world leaders convened to address the growing problem.



German citizens pass Jewish stores destroyed in Berlin during Kristallnacht, 1938.

By now, Golda had become a well-respected political leader in Palestine and was selected to attend the 1938 International Conference on Refugees in France. She was hopeful that other countries would help her people. She explained the terrible hardships that the Jews were suffering and begged other delegates to save them, but they offered only sympathy.

Soon, it was too late. When Hitler invaded Europe, the Jews were rounded up and forced into concentration and death camps. Over the course of World War II, six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust. After the war, the world reacted with shock as they learned of the horrors perpetrated by Hitler and his Nazi party.

Birth of a Nation

Golda called for the war refugees to be sent to Palestine immediately, but was met with resistance from the British government who did not want to anger the neighboring Arab nations. To her surprise, the British began to back away from the Balfour Declaration that had promised a path to Jewish statehood. The British government tightened its control over the area, but the Jews resisted and fought back.

As more shiploads of Jewish refugees came to Palestine, the British increased their forces, but it was not enough. In 1947, they deferred the whole problem of Palestine to the United Nations. Within months, the United Nations decided that Palestine would be divided into two independent nations – one Arab and the other Jewish.

The Jews erupted in joy, but the five neighboring Arab nations began to prepare for war, in an effort to drive the Jews from the land. With an army of only 40,000 soldiers, Jewish leaders lacked the necessary resources.

Golda rushed to the United States, delivering powerful pro-Zionist speeches all across America to raise funds for the cause. In nearly three months, Golda had raised \$50 million to help equip the Jewish army.

On May 14, 1948, Golda's lifelong dream became a reality when the Jewish state in Palestine was officially established as Israel. Golda fought back tears as she signed her name to the Proclamation of Independence.

A Natural Leader

Just one day later, five Arab armies attacked Israel. World leaders believed the war would end quickly because Israel was outnumbered, but the Jews persisted. They drove out the armies of Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt. The war ended when the United Nations helped negotiate a truce between Israel and the Arab nations.

Prime Minister Ben-Gurion asked Golda to serve as first Israeli ambassador to the Soviet Union and later, as Israel's Minister of Labor and Social Security. Golda became

responsible for the welfare of every new immigrant to Israel. Seven years later, she was named Foreign Minister. By now, Golda had become one of the most well-known and beloved figures in all of Israel.

She retired from public office in 1966 and resumed a modest life as a private citizen, but everything changed when she learned of Prime Minister Levi Eshkol's sudden heart attack and death. The Israeli government needed a prime minister and once again called upon Golda.

Prime Minister Meir

Golda's five-year term as prime minister proved challenging. She faced the ongoing threat of war, in addition to domestic problems including high **inflation**, labor shortages, and a wave of new immigrants. During her term, Israeli soldiers suffered grave casualties in the Yom Kippur War when they were attacked by Syria in the North and Egypt in the South.

Protesters demanded an investigation, citing the country's unpreparedness for the war. For the rest of her life, Meir regretted not acting earlier to protect more Israeli soldiers. She was later **exonerated**, but ultimately held herself responsible for the loss of life. She officially left office in 1974 following a disengagement treaty with Syria.

In 1978, Golda succumbed to a 15-year battle with cancer. She had requested a simple funeral with no eulogies, yet nearly one hundred thousand people came to pay their respects. Throughout her life, Golda dreamed of peace for Israel and its neighbors, believing it was attainable as long as Israel remained strong.



Fascinating Facts about Golda

- When she married Morris, Goldie Mabovitch became Golda Meyerson. When Ben-Gurion encouraged her to adopt a Hebrew last name, she chose Meir, which in Hebrew means “illuminate.”
- Golda formed *The American Young Sisters Society* to collect money to buy textbooks for schoolchildren who couldn’t afford them.
- Golda’s parents didn’t think it proper for her to protest on street corners, but after



witnessing one of her powerful speeches, her parents relented.

- Golda traveled over 300 miles disguised as an Arab woman to meet with King Abdullah of Trans-Jordan in an effort to dissuade him from joining other Arab states in a war against Israel.
- Golda was known for hosting late-night meetings in her kitchen. Israelis often commented that important government decisions were “cooked in Golda’s kitchen.”

Choosing What’s Right

1. Golda Meir was deeply influenced by:

- a. Fear of the pogroms and the Cossacks
- b. Her older sister Shayna, who taught her to stand up for what was right
- c. Zionist leaders who wanted to build a Jewish state in Palestine
- d. All of the above

2. Golda and her family emigrated to America:

- a. In 1903, settling in Madison, Wisconsin
- b. In 1916, settling in Denver, Colorado
- c. In 1906, settling in Milwaukee, Wisconsin

3. Eleven-year-old Golda and her friends formed *The American Young Sisters Society* to:

- a. Collect money for a local theater troupe
- b. Raise money for textbooks, for children who couldn’t afford them
- c. Raise funds for a local orphanage

4. Golda committed to following her dream of:

- a. Becoming a teacher
- b. Settling and building a Jewish homeland in Palestine
- c. Marrying young and raising a family

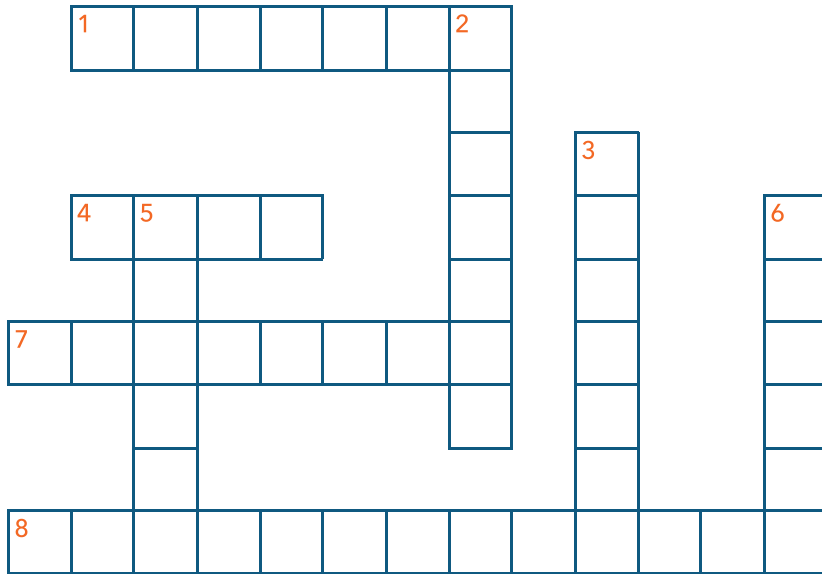
5. As a member of Kibbutz Merhaviva, Golda:

- a. Cleared and drained the swampland for farming
- b. Raised and cared for farm animals
- c. Dug ditches, built roads, and planted trees

6. Golda served as a political leader in several key positions, including:

- a. Minister of Finance, Foreign Minister, Prime Minister
- b. Ambassador to Moscow, Minister of Labor and Social Security, Prime Minister
- c. Minister of Labor and Social Security, Minister of Defense, Prime Minister

Crossword Puzzle



ACROSS

1. A collective community in Israel
4. The city where Golda was born
7. Violent mobs that swept through Russian towns to destroy property and attack Jews
8. Golda held this distinction in eighth grade

DOWN

2. Political movement that supports the state of Israel as the Jewish homeland
3. The British declaration that signaled a path to Jewish statehood
5. The name of the Jewish homeland, established in 1948
6. Golda determined that _____ was required to make her dreams a reality

Answer key on page 10

Detect the Difference

Find the five differences in these nearly identical images of an Israeli banknote featuring Golda Meir. The back of the bill (shown on page 10) depicts a crowd of Russian Jews welcoming Golda as the first Israeli ambassador to the Soviet Union, with the verse "Let my people go" (Exodus 9:1).



Answer key on page 10



Glossary

- **Exonerate:** To free from blame.
- **Ghetto:** A section of a city in which all Jews were required to live, due to discrimination.
- **Inflation:** A steady increase in the level of consumer prices or a steady decline in the purchasing power of money.
- **Insurgent:** Rebelling against the leadership of a political party.
- **Kibbutz:** An Israeli settlement rooted in the values of social responsibility, communal and cooperative living, and Jewish culture and tradition.
- **Pogrom:** (Russian for “devastation”) A violent, government-condoned mob that swept through a town, destroying property and attacking Jews in Russia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
- **Trajectory:** A chosen path or course.
- **Zionist:** One who supports the preservation of Israel as the Jewish state, originally arising in the late 1800s with the goal of reestablishing a Jewish homeland in the region of Palestine.



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CHOOSING WHAT'S RIGHT KEY: 1-d, 2-c, 3-b, 4-b, 5-a, 6bc. CROSSWORD KEY: ACROSS: 1. KIBBUTZ, 4: KIEV, 7. POGROMS, 8. VALEDICTORIAN, DOWN: 2. ZIONISM, 3. BALFOUR, 5. ISRAEL, 6. ACTION.