

GOLDA MEIR

In 1969 Meir became the first female Prime Minister of Israel. When she was Prime Minister, she said that Jewish refugees no longer existed because there was now a place for all Jews to live. "The Jewish state," she declared, "is prepared to take every Jew, whether he/she has anything or not, whether he/she is a skilled worker or not, whether he/she is sick or not. It doesn't make a particle of difference." She once said, "We are not a new people. We have not come back to a new country. We are an old people that has come back to its old home." She resigned from the office of Prime Minister after the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

Golda was a heroine to world Jewry and was a woman who showed a great deal of courage. She had a wonderful way of explaining things. She was a leader in Israel during peace and during war and felt very strongly about protecting the Jewish people and Israel. "If we have to have a choice between being dead, and pitied, and being alive with a bad image, we'd rather be alive and have the bad image." Golda Meir died on December 8, 1978.

Questions:

1. If you were made a prime minister (like our president) of a country, what are the five major problems you would try to solve.
2. What issues do you think Golda Meir faced as a woman and a prime minister? Do you think they were different than if she had been a man?
3. Why do you think she dressed up like an Arab when she visited the king of Jordan?
4. Draw a map showing where Golda was born in Kiev, Russia; where she grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and where she moved to in Israel. Color each country a different color.

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(1898 - 1979)



Golda Meir was born in Kiev, Russia. Her father was a carpenter. In Russia she saw terrible violence against Jews called progroms. These childhood memories made her believe that there had to be a Jewish country. When Golda was eight years old, her family moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She grew up and then she became a school teacher. With her husband, Morris Meyerson, Golda moved to Palestine in 1921, where they joined a kibbutz, a collective farm. At this time they changed their name from Meyerson to Meir, which means 'giver of light.'

All ages of woman, young and old, were important in helping Israel become a country. They were members of the First Aliyah; they fought side by side with men in Israel's wars. Golda Meir became active in politics and was soon elected to head the Histadrut, Israel's central labor union. Israel became a country in 1948. She signed the Proclamation of Independence and was the only women member of Israel's first legislature. Right afterwards, Israel had to fight a war with the surrounding countries who did not want to recognize the existence of a Jewish country. Interestingly, just before the War of Independence, Golda dressed up as an Arab and secretly visited Emir Abdullah of Jordan, hoping to convince him to keep Jordan out of the upcoming war. Later Meir became a member of the Knesset ("Congress" of Israel) and Minister of Labor in 1949. She also served as Israel's first ambassador to the Soviet Union where three million Jews lived, five times the number of Jews that lived in Israel at the time. Under the communists (Russian government leaders) all religions were forbidden so this was a very difficult time for Jews and anyone else who wanted to practice their religion.