

WASHINGTON DATELINE

By TRUDE B. FELDMAN
ISRAELITE'S WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT



GOLDA MEIR GRANTS OUR WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT TRUDE B. FELDMAN AN EXCLUSIVE BIRTHDAY INTERVIEW AT THE MAYFLOWER IN WASHINGTON, D. C. (PHOTO BY H. GARFINKLE).

Birthday Interview

"My birthday is not important -- but Israel's birthday is. The Jewish state will far surpass my 75 years. . ."

So said Golda Meir at the outset of an exclusive interview on the eve of her 75th birthday, (May 3rd).

This is typical of the humility displayed by Israel's Prime Minister who has -- for 52 years -- put her adopted country before herself.

Mrs. Meir said that the ingathering of the Jewish people is Israel's greatest achievement in its 25-year history.

"Today, the phrase 'Jewish refugee' no longer exists because there is an Israel, a place for Jews to come home to. And they're coming from the four corners of the earth. Two million immigrants have come into our land."

She added that although many difficulties and complex problems still must be solved, there will never be a time when Israel won't have room for every Jew seeking a home there.

As for American 'Aliyah', Mrs. Meir said it has picked up since the Six-Day War, but that it's still not enough. "Young people are coming to Israel for at least part of their college education in our universities. We too have secondary schools where they come at the age of 14, and also get a good Jewish education. It gives them a feel for our country and many of them come back; some even stay in Israel."

Golda Meir is particularly concerned about Jewish education in the U. S. She said that there ought to be a greater effort on behalf of Jewish education there.

"It's extremely important," she stressed. "Too many young American Jews don't know who they are or where they come from. They have difficulty identifying themselves. They don't know Jewish history or literature. Some don't understand why they should remain Jews. It all adds up to a need for a better Jewish education. They need a sense of the Jewish past and a taste of the Jewish future in Israel. It's essential -- and only logical -- that young people who grow up in a free country, should get a good education; and with that education will come a connection with Israel and what's happening in Israel. . ."

Golda Meir's opinion of what other nations could learn from Israel; "I believe we've shown that even a small nation can -- if it is united and determined to safeguard its security and the welfare of its people -- prove itself, defend itself and meet its international responsibilities."

What should the United States do at this time to help settle the Mideast problems?

"A great country must pay a price for that greatness and carry the kind of responsibility

LAS VEGAS ISRAELITE which greatness demands," Mrs. Meir responded. "This is particularly true of America, which sees its obligation to keep the peace by helping freedom-loving countries to protect themselves against aggression.

"As far as the Mideast is concerned, we would welcome the United States' role in getting the parties together at a negotiating table. I believe the U. S. wants to play this role. We want direct negotiations, but we're prepared to begin with indirect ones, providing they are serious."

She said there are no tricks or magic formulas to bring about peace. "It depends upon the Arab leaders. We're prepared to step on the path that leads to peace when they make up their minds that nothing can be solved by war."

In reply to a question, Mrs. Meir said she hopes for a detente between the U. S. and the Soviet Union because that would indeed lessen the tension in the Mideast.

Speaking on a more personal note, Mrs. Meir said that it's not easy to be a Prime Minister, but that it's easier to be one of a country whose people are a source of strength and inspiration to those who lead it.

"Their spirit, their determination, and their strength give me that spirit, that determination and that strength which is needed to take a stand or to carry out a policy," she said. "I believe that President Nixon also gathers strength from the people and from their readiness to make the sacrifices that Americans have made for peace and freedom. No leader can act effectively without feeling that special sense of support from the people."

Mrs. Meir emphasized that Israel truly appreciates the support, sympathy and understanding which the American people have given -- unflinchingly and unstintingly -- over the past 25 years.

"Your country has given us more than material support; it has demonstrated genuine understanding," she said. "And President Nixon, with whom I work very well, has built and strengthened that support and understanding -- both of which serve as a powerful link between our two countries."

In conclusion, she said that as Israel celebrates her 25th anniversary, she looks back on a quarter of a century of struggle; of achievement in some areas -- but of failure in others.

"By and large, it has justified a thousand-fold the vision of those who saw in the re-establishment of Israel's nationhood a historic act of reparation and of statesmanship," she said. "But our greatest grief has been the lack of achieving that real peace with our Arab neighbors."

Does Golda Meir have a special Birthday wish?

"Yes, two of them -- peace in the Middle East and more Jews should come to Israel. . ."

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