

## Golda Meir - Two Years After Her Death

BY SIMON GRIVER

It is two years since the death of Golda Meir. Her story is one of remarkable achievement and unusual devotion to the building of the State of Israel. It is also a story that encompasses the tragedies and triumphs of twentieth century Jewry.

She was born in Kiev in 1898. Goldie Mabovitch, the daughter of a carpenter, soon learned the cruel reality of being a Jew in Tsarist Russia. "I didn't know then of course what a pogrom was," she recalls in her autobiography "My Life." "But I knew it had something to do with the rabble that used to surge through town, brandishing knives and sticks, screaming Christ-killers."

When she was eight the family emigrated to Milwaukee. The reason behind the move was that her older sister Sheyna, a fervent Zionist who wore black for two years after Herzl's death was being closely scrutinized by the police. Dozens of Golda's uncles, aunts and cousins remained behind in Russia and all perished in the death camps during the Nazi occupation.

In Milwaukee the family struggled to make ends meet but were able to relax in the atmosphere of freedom and tolerance. At sixteen Golda asserted her independence from her parents by moving to Denver where she stayed with her sister Sheyna and her husband, Shamai. It was here that she fell in love with Morris Meyerson, whom she later married. But not before she returned to Milwaukee to study to become a teacher. By now she was already active in the Labor Zionist movement and faced a difficult dilemma, torn between the comforts of American life and the dream of building a Jewish state. She was never one for soft options and in 1920 she set sail for Palestine on the 'Pocahontas,' along with Morris, Sheyna, Shamai and other friends. She took with her to Eretz Yisrael an appreciation of America's democratic values and later, as one of the architects of the Jewish State, took pains to put these principles into practice. A Labor Day parade in Milwaukee always stuck in her mind. "Police on horseback were actually escorting the marchers instead of dispersing them. For me the parade symbolized American freedom."

It was a disappointment to find out that the land of her dreams was a humid, underdeveloped wilderness, but she remained undaunted. They moved to Merhavia, a kibbutz in the valley of Jezreel, where Golda became renowned throughout the region for introducing such bourgeois luxuries as tablecloths. These decadent indulgences were tolerated by her fellow kibbutzniks who believed in her and sent her to national conferences as their representative. But the backbreaking work told on Morris' health and they were forced to return to city life. There then followed spells in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem where Morris worked in the offices of the construction company of the Trade Union Movement while Golda busied herself in her lesser known role of housewife bringing up their two children, Sarah and Menachem.

Throughout these times of the British Mandate she took increasing responsibilities in the Labor Movement and served on its decision making council. She made several tours of America and raised millions of dollars. Ben Gurion astutely described her as America's

greatest gift to Israel. On the even of Israel's independence she risked her life by travelling disguised in a black veil as an Arab woman to Amman, in one last attempt to get Jordan's King Abdullah not to go to war with Israel. The mission failed but it was this kind of resolution that characterizes Golda's personal and political behavior.

Golda became Ambassador to Moscow, a sensitive post that she did not relish but filled admirably, becoming a focus for expressions of identification with Israel by Soviet Jews. She returned in 1949 to an even greater challenge as Minister of Labor and Housing when Israel was absorbing hundreds of thousands of refugees. "I am still amazed by the sheer number of immigrants we absorbed," she recalls. But the amazing was accomplished in no short measure through Golda's endeavors. She moved in the mid-fifties to the Foreign Ministry, where in over a decade she built up close ties with numerous African, Asian and Latin American countries and was for the first time able to get America to solidly back Israel's cause.

In 1965 she retired from politics, not even tempted by the offer of deputy Prime Minister. She wanted to enjoy a relaxing private life. Her husband had died in 1951 but she had a large and close-knit family. "My five grandchildren are my greatest joy in life," she wrote.

However, personal indulgences had to be sacrificed. Reluctantly she returned to help heal splits in the Labor party. After Eshkol's death in 1969, Golda Meir was pressed into becoming Prime Minister as the only person capable of doing the job in the post Six Day War era. Only the third ever woman Premier in the world, she led the country in a period culminating in the trauma of the Yom Kippur War. She retired in 1974 after seeing the country through the precarious aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, handing over the reins to younger leadership.

In modern times most politicians fight hard to achieve high office. Golda was also a fighter but never for personal fame or fortune. Perhaps two quotations from her words give an indication of her philosophy:

"When peace comes we will perhaps in time be able to forgive the Arabs for killing our sons, but it will be harder for us to forgive them for having forced us to kill their sons." (1969)

"I want my grandchildren to live in an Israel that is part and parcel of this entire area, but I don't want them to live in an Israel that will always be complimented as the only democratic state here, the only developed state. I want Israel to be part of a highly developed culturally advanced Middle East with much cooperation between its peoples. Each people maintaining its individual characteristics and yet a region that lives together. Above all, I hope that Israel will become the ideal, just society of which we dreamed." (1970)

### Chanukah Customs

BY RABBI DR. SHMUEL HIMELSTEIN

Chanukah is the time for Dreydel, for Latkes and for Ma'oz Tzur for Jews throughout the world, right? Well actually, that is only true for those Jews whose forebears came from either Central or Eastern Europe; for Jews whose ancestors hailed from Spain (including most of those who lived in the Near East and North Africa), these customs are completely foreign.

We must remember that Jewish practice is divided into two parts: Jewish law, which is a constant, regardless of where one lives, and custom, which evolves in each environment. Jewish law requires one to light the Chanukah Menorah, and that is a practice found throughout the world; Jewish custom in Europe had its Latkes and Dreydlach -- but these customs were limited to the Ashkenazic Jews.

But we needn't feel that the Sefardic Jews were deprived. The fact is that each community had its own individual customs, which are still observed by its descendants to this day.

This article will attempt to introduce you to some of the less well-known Chanukah customs of Jews throughout the world.

You probably haven't heard of the song "Yatza Limlock," sung yearly in the traditional melody -- but then again, neither have the Jews of Iraq, who sing this particular song on Chanukah, heard of Ma'oz Tzur. The chances are that you haven't heard of other customs of the Iraqi Jews either: for example, students in the schools all used to receive a gift for Chanukah which was called a Menora -- a page printed in the form of a Menora on colored paper, using gold-colored ink. It contained various quotations about Chanukah, and had a space for the student's name to be inscribed. The pages were specially printed for the students in Calcutta. Another gift was the complete story of Chanukah in booklet form, written in Arabic, but using Hebrew type.

The Jews of Morocco had a custom of reciting eight different verses of the Bible when taking out the Torah scroll from the Ark. Each verse mentioned the word "light." Instead of Latkes, though, they used doughnuts. (If one thinks of it, both customs have a common origin -- both foods are steeped in oil, and oil is the symbol of the entire festival.)

Another Moroccan custom was a fast day that was held on either the second or third of the month of Tevet, or the last day of the holiday. This was not a conventional fast day -- that would be forbidden on a holiday -- but was called "the Rosh Chodesh (New Month) of the Girls." On that day the women baked honey cakes, and everyone sent along gifts to the girls. Every man who was engaged would send along gifts to his betrothed. A special festive meal was also held on that day in each home, to commemorate how Judith had managed to overcome Holofernes.

Statistics tell us that 20% of all marriages in Israel (and the percentage is increasing yearly) are between people of different origins (i.e. Ashkenazic and Oriental Jews). Maybe with the course of time this gigantic ingathering of the Exiles will result in a new set of traditions arising, based on all that is beautiful in the different traditions of Jews throughout the world.

As these random examples show, different Jewish communities find their own distinctive ways to express their feelings about this festival, as they did for every other occasion. The customs, on the whole, added extra dimensions, and contributed much to the richness of Jewish life. It was not in vain that the Sages of the Talmud told us that "A custom of Israel has the force of law."

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