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Section 4

HISTORYMAKERS **Golda Meir**
Israel's Founding Mother

"If there is any explanation necessary for the direction my life has taken, perhaps it is the desire to save Jewish children from a similar experience."—Golda Meir, describing persecution she saw as a child in Russia

Born in the Ukraine and raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Golda Meir helped found Israel. She signed its declaration of independence, served in the government, and led the nation in a difficult time.

Meir was born Goldie Mabovitch in 1898. Her family came to the United States when she was a child. While her parents scratched out a living, she became an excellent student. By high school, she was committed to the cause of Zionism—finding a home in Palestine for the Jewish people—and to socialism. She became a notable speaker for a local group that pushed both causes. She spoke on street corners, which appalled her father. He threatened to drag her home by the hair but changed his mind after hearing her speak.

At age 21, Mabovitch married Morris Myerson. She then met Jewish leader David Ben-Gurion, who was touring the United States to build support for Zionism. In 1921, she persuaded her husband to move to Palestine. They lived a few years on a kibbutz—a communal farm—and then moved to the city of Tel Aviv. She participated in several organizations that promoted workers' rights and Zionism. Gaining influence, she joined the National Council, the body set up by British colonial officials to give some self-rule to Jewish people in this region.

After World War II, Jewish leaders in Palestine called for independence, and the British reacted by arresting Ben-Gurion and other Jewish activists. Goldie Myerson then became acting political chief for Jewish Palestine. She traveled to the United States and collected \$50 million for her cause. Disguising herself as an Arab, she traveled to Jordan to persuade it not to attack the Jewish state.

On May 14, 1948, the nation of Israel was proclaimed. She was the only woman in the new government. After a stint as Israel's chief diplomat in the Soviet Union, she served as the minister charged with finding jobs and houses for the hundreds of thousands of immigrants streaming into Israel.

In 1956, Myerson changed her name to the Hebrew form, Golda Meir. She became Israel's for-

eign minister in Ben-Gurion's government. She joined him in taking a tough stand against the attacks by Israel's Arab neighbors. For her support, Ben-Gurion wryly called her "the only man in my cabinet." She remained in this post for ten years, not only serving as Israel's chief diplomat but also representing the country in the United Nations.

Meir retired from government service in 1966. In 1969, the prime minister of Israel died. Meir was chosen to succeed him. Later that year, elections were held, but her party did not win a majority. As a result, she formed a government that combined several parties in a fragile coalition.

Meir faced a number of challenges. Israel was in a virtual state of war with its Arab neighbors. She urged peace but insisted that Arab leaders meet with Israel face to face. She campaigned to win military help, economic aid, and diplomatic support for Israel from the United States. In 1973, Meir feared that Egypt and Syria were preparing an attack. Persuaded by the United States that Israel would suffer in world opinion if it attacked first, she waited. The Arab nations attacked on the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur.

Israel was battered in the Yom Kippur war but eventually fought back. The United States brokered a peace agreement, but during these talks the 76-year-old Meir decided to retire. Three years later, Egypt's president, Anwar Sadat, stunned the world by traveling to Israel. It was the first time an Arab leader had done so. He made a point of stopping to visit Meir. The peace she had sought for so long seemed to be at hand. She died the following year.

Questions

1. **Recognizing Facts and Details** What evidence suggests that Meir was a persuasive speaker?
2. **Evaluating Judgments** When she died, Meir was called "an extraordinary person." Explain why she might have earned that description.
3. **Making Inferences** How did Meir's childhood experiences influence her?