

Our “Esthers” of Israel Jewish Women Making a Difference for a Jewish State

On Purim, we retell the story of Queen Esther and her brave actions that saved the Jewish people from elimination in the land of Shushan. Esther is not alone in her heroism; our history is punctuated with strong women who have accomplished things for the Jewish people and for the Zionist dream of a Jewish state. As we celebrate Purim and the triumph of Queen Esther, let us also celebrate those women who have followed in her footsteps.



The Original Heroine



Esther

Born in Shushan, in the ancient Persian Empire.

Known for:

Using her wits and courage to become Queen of the Persian Empire, and saving the Jewish people from destruction.

Being the female protagonist of the story of Purim.

Accomplishments:

Seeking justice for the Jewish people in the kingdom by winning the favor of King Ahasuerus, then later revealing her Jewish heritage and convincing him to spare her people.

Subverting traditional structures of power and using her beauty, charm, and political intelligence to achieve her goal



Diva of Israeli Song



Born in Dhamar, Yemen.
The family immigrated to
Mandate Palestine in 1924 in the
wake of growing persecution
against the Jews, and settled in
Rishon LeZion.

Known for:

Introducing pop music to Israel in
1948 and helping to create a unique
sense of cultural identity for the newly
formed state.

She was gifted with an unusually powerful
voice and presence, known for
her distinctive husky voice and Yem-
enite pronunciation.

At 14, her first songs were broadcast
on the radio.

Accomplishments:

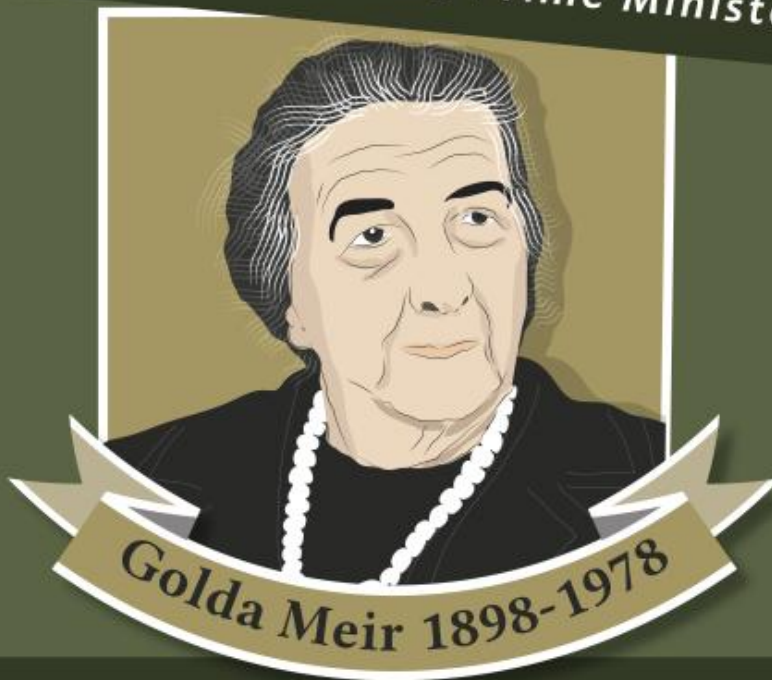
Her first record was released in 1948
and her best-known song Kalaniyot
(Anemones), by Moshe Vilenski, dates
from that period. She was especially
popular among Israeli soldiers, for
whom she frequently performed.

She was awarded the Israel Prize in
1988 or 1998 for her contributions to
vocal music

In 2005, aged 82, she recorded two
tracks for the Mimaamakim album by
Idan Raichel's Project and participated
in some of their live performances.
The two had been slated to begin an-
other joint project before she died in
2006.



Israel's First Female Prime Minister



Born in Kiev, Ukraine in 1898. Was brought to Milwaukee as a child, then settled in Palestine in 1921. Died 1978.

Known for:

Becoming Israel's fourth Prime Minister in 1969; Israel's first female Prime Minister and the world's third.

Leadership of Histadrut-Labor Zionist movement.

Described as "The Iron Lady" of Israeli politics, before the phrase became associated with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

Maintaining strong relations between Israel and the United States, and raised millions of U.S. dollars that went towards the establishment of the state.

Accomplishments:

Led Israel as Prime Minister through the War of Attrition and the Yom Kippur War.

Awarded the Israel Prize for her special contribution to society and the State of Israel in 1975.

Awarded the honor of World Mother by American Mothers, Inc.



Israeli Activist & Change Maker



Daphni Leef 1986

Born in 1986 in Jerusalem, Israel. Moved to Tel Aviv to study film at Tel Aviv University.

Known For:

Sparking the Tel Aviv housing protests in July 2011 and establishing the first encampment in central Tel Aviv in the Rothschild Boulevard to protest the high cost of housing in Israel.

Starting one of the largest waves of mass protest in Israel's history, inspiring demonstrations throughout the country with the demand to return to the welfare-state model.

Accomplishments:

Leef is a professional video editor and has created many short films, music videos for Israeli singers (such as Eran Tzur, Michal Amdursky and Noam Nevo) and films for various political NGOs, including a short work for the "Free Israel" association, which promotes civil marriage in Israel.



Israeli Opposition Leader



Tziporah Malkah "Tzipi" Livni was born in Tel Aviv in 1958.

Known For:

Livni is an Israeli lawyer and politician. She is the current Israeli Opposition Leader & leader of Kadima, the largest party in the Knesset.

Raised an ardent nationalist, Livni has become one of the nation's leading voices for the two-state solution. In Israel she has earned a reputation as honest, clean, and sticking to her principles.

She is the first woman to be leader of the opposition in Israel. In 2011 Livni was named one of "150 Women Who Shake the World" by Newsweek and The Daily Beast.

Accomplishments:

She received the Abirat Ha-Shilton ("Quality of Governance") award for 2004. On 1 October 2005, she was appointed Minister of Justice after several months acting in that position.

Livni was first elected to the Knesset as a member of the Likud party in 1999. When Likud leader Ariel Sharon became prime minister in July 2001, Livni was appointed Minister of Regional Co-operation, and thereafter held various Cabinet positions including Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Minister of Immigrant Absorption and Minister of Housing and Construction.



Intelligence Expert & Martyr



Sarah Aaronsohn 1890-1917

Born in Zikhron Ya'akov in 1890. Returned to her family's home after an unhappy marriage in Constantinople.

Known for:

Sarah Aaronsohn is the martyr heroine of NILI, the Jewish espionage network that helped free Palestine from Ottoman control during WWI.

In reverence to her memory, pilgrimages are made to Zikhron Ya'akov on the anniversary of her death.

Accomplishments:

Supervised agents' intelligence operations against Turkey and relayed information to the British in Egypt.

Sacrificed herself when espionage network was uncovered by Turkish authorities; she ordered its members to disperse and was arrested and tortured; but disclosed nothing. Aaronsohn ultimately took her own life rather than reveal information to the authorities.



Paratrooper Heroine & Poet



Hannah Senesh 1921-1944

Born in Hungary in 1921; in 1939 emigrated to what was then the British Mandate of Palestine in order to study in the Girls' Agricultural School at Nahalal.

Known for:

One of 37 Jews from the British Mandate for Palestine that were trained by the British army to parachute into Yugoslavia during WWII to help save the Jews of Hungary, who were about to be deported to the German death camp at Auschwitz.

Senesh was arrested at the Hungarian border, imprisoned and tortured, but she refused to reveal details of her mission and was eventually tried and executed by firing squad.

She is regarded as a national heroine in Israel, where several streets, the headquarters of the Zionist youth movements *Israel Hatzair* and a kibbutz are named after her.

Accomplishments:

Senesh was a poet and playwright, writing both in Hungarian and Hebrew. The best known of her works is *Halikha LeKesariya* ("A Walk to Caesarea"), commonly known as *Eli* ("My God, My God").

*My God, My God,
I pray that these things never end,
The sand and the sea,
The rustle of the waters,
Lightning of the Heavens,
The prayer of Man.*



Israeli Labor Party Leader



Shelly Yachimovich 1960

Born in 1960 in Kfar Saba, Israel. Her parents were Holocaust survivors who immigrated to Israel from Poland.

Known for:

Yachimovich is an Israeli journalist and politician. A member of the Knesset since 2006, she is currently leader of the Israeli Labor Party.

Before entering politics she was a reporter and a radio and television broadcaster. As a journalist, she covered women's and social welfare issues.

Accomplishments:

She has written two novels, "Eshet Ish" (2001) and "Miskhakei Zuggot" (2003) and recently published a nonfiction book, "Anakhnu" (2011).

She brought feminist & social agendas to prime time radio and along with her peer Karmela Menashe, gave a stable platform for the women of "Four Mothers" movement, until the withdrawal of the I.D.F. from Lebanon.

As parliament member she leads extensive action and legislation in social and economic issues, focusing on workers rights and on contractor's workers specifically.



American Zionist Leader & Hadassah Founder



Henrietta Szold 1860-1945

Born in 1860 in Baltimore, Maryland; was the daughter of a Baltimore Rabbi. Visited Palestine for the first time in 1909 at age 49; made Aliyah in 1933 at age 73.

Known for:

Henrietta Szold was a U.S. Jewish Zionist leader and founder of the Hadassah Women's Organization.

Advocated for health, education and welfare of the Yishuv (pre-state Jewish community of Palestine).

Co-founded the Ihud party in 1942, which advocated Arab-Jewish unity and a binational solution.

Accomplishments:

Was active in assisting Jewish immigrants to the United States. She established the first American night school to provide English language instruction and vocational skills to Russian Jewish immigrants in Baltimore.

Through Hadassah, established hospitals, a medical school, dental facilities, x-ray clinics, infant welfare stations, soup kitchens and other services for Palestine's Jewish & Arab inhabitants.



First Israeli Olympic Medalist



Yael Arad 1967

Yael Arad
is an Israeli
Judoka. Born in Tel
Aviv, Israel in 1967

Known for:

Arad became the first Israeli to win an Olympic medal at the Olympic games in Barcelona in 1992.

Arad is widely recognized as one of the country's most successful athletes of all time, and is credited with bringing the judo sport to the athletic mainstream. A two-time Olympian, Arad put judo on the map in Israel, making it a popular sport in the country.

Her Accomplishments, In Her Own Words:
"Thursday, July 30, 1992. A fateful day,

a watershed day, a day of fame, a day of self-fulfillment. A day that required fifteen years of hard work, endless investment and hidden self-confidence. The day I won the Olympic silver medal. My medal. The first medal of the State of Israel. ...Emotionally it was the highest moment of my life and despite my losing later in the finals the victory in the semi-finals against the woman from Germany was the sweetest of all. That day I changed from a person who wanted to a person who could. And that made all the difference."

