

Golda Meir & the 1946 Seder of Solidarity

GOLDA MEIR: A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Golda Meir was a pioneering Israeli stateswoman who became the fourth prime minister of Israel and its first (and to date only) female head of government. Born Goldie Mabovitch in Kiev in 1898, she emigrated with her family to the United States when she was 8 years old. Her talent for organizing and political work began early: at the age of 10, while studying at school, she realized that not all the girls there could afford textbooks. So she and her friend Regina set up an unofficial neighborhood organization called “American Society of Young Sisters.” Their organization successfully raised money to buy textbooks for children.



Golda at the Merhaviah kibbutz

Golda later moved to Mandatory Palestine in 1921, where she became deeply involved in the Zionist movement and labor politics while living and working on the Merhaviah kibbutz. In the 1920s and 1930s she worked as an emissary and fundraising representative for the Pioneer Women movement in the United States (now known as NA'AMAT USA), and would use that experience as part of her broader Labor Zionist activism.

Over the decades she rose through the ranks of the Jewish Agency and the Israeli government, serving as minister of labor and then foreign minister, before becoming Prime Minister in 1969. She remained an influential figure until her death in 1978.

THE REFUGEE HUNGER STRIKE AND THE SEDER OF SOLIDARITY

In early 1946, many leaders of the Jewish Agency, including its political head Moshe Sharett, were arrested by British authorities because of their resistance to British restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine from Europe (known as *Aliyah Bet*). During Sharett's detention, Golda Meir (then Golda Meyerson) was installed as acting head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, making her one of the principal spokespeople and decision-makers for the Jewish community.

The British began to crack down even more harshly on Jewish immigration. Two ships, the *Dov Hoz* and *Eliyahu Golomb*, were caught bringing over one thousand Jewish refugees, and so they were detained in the Italian port of La Spezia in March 1946. The

passengers, who were mostly Holocaust survivors straight out of the concentration camps, declared a hunger strike. They refused food to protest the British authorities' refusal to let them sail to Palestine, and to make it impossible to detain them indefinitely.

Golda Meir took charge of the solidarity response. At her instigation, a group of thirteen Jewish leaders in Jerusalem began a public hunger strike to show support for the refugees aboard the ships. Despite recovering from illness at the time and told not to fast by her doctor, she insisted on joining the hunger strike herself.

The hunger strike lasted 104 hours (over four days), starting on April 8, 1946. The final day of the fast, April 11, was the Eve of Passover, and that night's Seder became known as the Seder of Solidarity. Survivors doing the Seder on the boats, as well as those like Golda Meir holding this Seder in Jerusalem, used small pieces of matzah or symbolic gestures to mark the holiday. After the Seder, the refugees aboard the *Dov Hoz* and *Eliyahu Golomb* continued their hunger strike. This drew more and more international attention, especially from Jewish communities in Europe and the US. Jewish Agency leaders, including Golda Meir, continued lobbying the British through diplomatic channels. Finally, on May 8, the boat was allowed to depart. On May 13, 1946, the *Dov Hoz* and *Eliyahu Golomb* arrived safely with their passengers in Haifa.

THE INCIDENT IN HER OWN WORDS

“The next day the refugees started a hunger strike... We decided that we, the representatives of the National Committee, would fast for them, and we started a hunger strike in Israel until the boat would receive permission to sail to Israel. On the second day of the hunger strike there was a general fast of all the Jews in Israel from the age of 13 and upwards. We suddenly felt that we were a trapped people.

On the third day of the fast it was the eve of Passover, and thousands from all over Israel went up to Jerusalem to express their empathy and carrying flowers. The Chief Rabbis, who fasted together with us and who conducted the special Seder, decided that one person would eat a small piece of matza the size of an olive. We put tea cups on the table instead of wine glasses for the people who were fasting, we read from the Haggadah “in each and every generation man must consider himself as if he has left Egypt....the Holy One

Blessed by He did not only redeem our forefathers but rather we were also redeemed together with them". Every year on Seder Night we say those words but this time we understood them in a new way.

I will never forget my children joining me at the Jewish Agency for the Seder, which may have been their most important lesson in the suffering of the Jews, the love of Judaism, and the resilience of the Jewish people."

The 1946 hunger strikes and the Seder of Solidarity are among many moments in Jewish history that hold deep symbolic meaning. Just as the refugees on the boats and leaders like Golda Meir in Palestine both fasted and held a Seder under extraordinary hardship, Jews have historically found ways to celebrate Passover together even in the most perilous circumstances. Now, with Israel once again facing an existential war with Iran, let us in the Diaspora commit to the duty of solidarity with our people, on this night and all other nights.

Chag Sameach!

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The Dov Hoz ship arrives from Italy, 1946.



The Women's Organization for the Pioneer Women of Palestine was officially founded in 1925. Today it is known as NAAMAT USA. This early photograph of its leaders includes Goldie Meyerson (Golda Meir), second from left in the back. Private collection.

A Seder of Solidarity in 2026

THE FIRST CUP

Before drinking, we say:

“In every generation, we see ourselves as if we personally left Egypt. Tonight, we also see ourselves as part of one global people.”

MATZAH

After the blessing, add:

“From Egypt to today, the Jewish story continues.”

MAROR (BITTER HERB)

After the blessing, add:

“As we taste bitterness, we acknowledge ongoing struggles with our brothers and sisters in the land of Israel and across the world.”

THE FIFTH CUP (THE CUP OF ELIJAH)

Pour an additional symbolic cup. Then add:

“We pour this fifth cup to celebrate hope, peace, and the vision of a future where all Jews live in safety and dignity.”

Activities:

1. Go around the table and share one connection, wish, or memory you have about Israel.
2. Leave a chair empty to honor the Israeli people, soldiers, and victims of violence.
3. Make traditional Israeli additions to the menu: hummus, Israeli salad, *matbucha* (Moroccan tomato and pepper dip), *baba ghanoush* (roasted eggplant dip), etc.
4. Play Israeli music (traditional or modern) during or after dinner.
5. Hide the afikoman with clues related to Israeli history.