I.

henrietta Szold grew up too fast, and never grew up at all. Born to Rabbi Benjamin Szold and Sophie Szold in Baltimore in 1860, she was the eldest of five sisters. Early on she was long on organizational skills, and literary and pedagogic talent, but short on self-esteem. She developed an immense admiration and excessive devotion to her arthritic father, who came to rely on her for secretarial help, critical editing, and general research assistance.

Rabbi Benjamin Szold was of the generation of Louis D. Brandes’ uncle, Lewis Naphtali Dembitz, though Szold immigrated to the United States in 1859, somewhat later than Dembitz, and with his Jewish education already intact. He inculcated in his eldest daughter — and in this daughter alone — Hebrew language, German literature, some French and Hungarian, and the Breslau synthesis of traditional Jewish study and the scholarly investigation of Judaism (Wissenschaft des Judentums). In contrast to Brandes’ parents, Henrietta Szold’s detailed letters to her family reveal its intimate details, such as they were. Time and again, Szold met Ginzberg in association with his translation of his works which she was carrying out for JPS, and time and again, at parting, the simple, single phrase of unequivocal, underrated, unappreciated communal activist acquired.

2.

enrietta Szold did not, could not, leave home until she was thirty-three. After graduating from high school first in her class, a college career beckoned, but she would not leave her father. She hired out as an instructor in a Baltimore boarding school, became an editorial secretary of the new Jewish Publication Society (JPS), and then at thirty-three, was offered the position of editor of editorial secretary of the new Jewish Publication Society (JPS). This would mean leaving home — father — for Philadelphia. Rabbi Szold, recently discharged from his position, no longer needed her help so intensively. For the first time Henrietta would wrench herself away from him. Overworked and uncomplaining, it also unhappy at JPS, Henrietta Szold characteristicly took on still additional responsibilities with the founding of the Federation of American Zionists, in 1898. At a time when Zionism was unpopular, she became one of its first American supporters — an extension of her Hebrew interest developed by her father. In 1901, she died, leaving Henrietta grief-stricken and guilt-ridden.

This editorial secretary was now asked by her mother to put her father’s papers in order. There was a problem: Henrietta did not know Talmud and thus could not understand many of his manuscripts (though she was the only person who could decipher his arthritic handwriting). Her mother suggested that she seek special permission from the newly appointed dean of the Jewish Theological Seminary, Solomon Schechter, to study there. She would be its first female student — at forty-three. And she was accepted. And she met Louis Ginsberg, age 30, eminent Lithuanian Talmud scholar.

3.

enrietta Szold’s lonely and courageous life of Henrietta Szold

The lonely and courageous life of Henrietta Szold

INTRODUCTION

If ever in modern Jewish history there has been a woman who could be credited for the bridging of cultures, it is in the land of the “fugitives of exiles.” The Jewish community from which the fewest number have exiled themselves to the Land of Israel in American Jewry. It has always appeared especially daunting to give up the ways of America for the hard-won rewards of Israel — even more daunting when Israel was Russia. One woman who took up the challenge and wrestled with the cross-cultural consequences was Henrietta Szold: American immigrant to Palestine in 1920; founder of the Hadassah Medical Organization and of Palestine’s first program in social work; mother of “Youth Aliyah”; and the embodiment of American Jewry. It has always appeared especially daunting to give up the ways of America for the hard-won rewards of Israel — even more so if also unhappy at JPS. Henrietta Szold characteristicly took on still additional responsibilities with the founding of the Federation of American Zionists, in 1898. At a time when Zionism was unpopular, she became one of its first American supporters — an extension of her Hebrew interest developed by her father. In 1901, she died, leaving Henrietta grief-stricken and guilt-ridden.

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Henrietta Szold was the American Jewish leader who became the first woman to edit and translate the works of Ginzberg, an influential Jewish scholar, and who founded Hadassah, a leading American Jewish organization. She was a pioneer in the field of medical care in Palestine and a key figure in the early stages of the Zionist movement. Szold was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1860, as the daughter of a prominent Jewish family. She received her education in Europe and returned to America in 1885 to become a nurse. She was initially engaged in missionary work in India, but returned to America in 1889 to become a nurse at the New York Infirmary.

Szold's commitment to Jewish Zionism was rooted in a deep sense of personal responsibility and a desire to address the needs of the Jewish people. She was a strong believer in the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, and she worked tirelessly to raise funds and support for the Zionist cause. Her leadership and vision helped to establish Hadassah, an organization that was dedicated to providing medical care and education in Palestine.

In addition to her work in medicine and education, Szold was also a key figure in the early stages of the Zionist movement. She was one of the first American Jewish women to become involved in the movement, and she played a key role in the establishment of the Federation of American Zionists. Szold was also a strong supporter of the two-state solution, and she worked to promote understanding and cooperation between Jewish and Arab communities in Palestine.

Henrietta Szold's legacy continues to inspire and influence many people today. Her dedication to improving the lives of others and her commitment to the ideals of Jewish Zionism continue to be an inspiration to generations of Americans and Jews around the world.
Palestine. (He, too, resigned, three years later). And now, Szold herself was leaving, in a sense, leaving her American and Palestinian colleagues in Hadassah for the organization that had always tried to gobble Hadassah up.

She was to supervise the health and education portfolios under the British Mandate for Palestine. The intrigue and endless bickering sickened her, turning her thoughts once again to America. But she stayed for two years, more and more adopting Palestine’s bureaucratic methods — the assertion of authority from behind rules which made no sense, which could not be changed — even as she repudiated this mentality. By 1929 she was again deeply disillusioned, ready for America, only to change her mind at the Zionist Congress in Zurich, only there to be ordered to America by Chaim Weizmann for a fundraising tour. There, non-Zionist leader Felix Warburg, recently co-opted into the Jewish Agency for Palestine by Weizmann, told her what a mess she and her colleagues had made of Palestine, and insulted her work specifically. Whereupon Miss Szold, always vulnerable, fled to Palestine, resigned from the Executive, and contemplated a return home. But where was home?

Hadassah dissolved her immobility, luring her back to America under a ruse, meeting her at the dock with the press, in announcement of a surprise birthday celebration of her seventieth birthday. Hadassah was now the largest constituent body within the Zionist Organization of America (far too big for the males any longer even to think of absorbing or controlling it), and Henrietta Szold was its founding hero. And so she decided: America was home. At least here they loved her. But in 1931 she was back in Palestine, again to manage health and education, this time on behalf of the newly established Vaad Leumi, a Palestinian Jewish body which was taking over responsibilities from the World Zionist Organization. And this time she was in Palestine to stay.

The advantage of starting a health and education system almost from scratch is that one can start whatever one pleases. Arriving in Palestine, Szold learned that the Vaad Leumi planned to establish a clearing-house for thousands of charitable organizations in Palestine. In a move which was to have decisive unintended consequences, Szold decided to make over the plan into a complete system of social services. Literally from nothing — no money, no Hebrew textbooks, no guidance, no social workers — she laid the foundation for a department of social welfare and a school of social work. To Szold personally, all this was to become secondary. For in Berlin in 1932, one Recha Freier had been told to contact Miss Szold’s new department. Freier had conceived the idea of sending German teenagers to Palestine, to be educated free of the stigma...
Henrietta Szold, founder of Hadassah

During World War I, Hadassah (then called the ‘American Zionist Medical Unit’) began regular treatment for trachoma in Palestinian schools. From Summoned to Jerusalem (Harper & Row)

plunging effects of anti-Semitism. The German Zionists were interested, provided that the Vaad Leumi would establish a suitable program. Old Miss Szold, her bureaucratic Pales-
tinian mentality well honed by now, found every possible rea-
on to object: Life in Palestine was hard, the bourgeois youth of Germany were not fit for it, there was no money, Palestinian

Henrietta Szold’s principled impracticality carried her to productive, practical work in Palestine — also, to a difficult moral choice on pacifism

She became the guide, the mother as it were, of thousands, acquiring the family she never had, counseling her children not to discard their German education, to remain whole in organic adaptation to Palestine, meeting them all personally at the port, visiting them regularly across the countryside, and, character-
istically, attending to the details of the voluminous paperwork. Whither, she was a tyrant in run-
ing her office, loved by some, feared by all, mad with temper, and still unmoved by the pres-
ures deriving from Nazism. Urged to falsify or in other ille-
gal ways to secure immigration certificates, above the parsimo-
nious British quota, in order to save, definitely, less 
many of these hardened 
antagonists attached to the children. Since, Henrietta Szold could not bear up. Worn down in trying to resolve the many-sided fight over another 
set of orphans, “the Tehran 
children,” she took ill, never to recover. Embodying, at her urging, around her deathbed in late De-
cember, 1943, two old politi-
cal enemies, long estranged —

In the end, Szold paid with her life for her inability to reconcile the deathbed wishes of martyred parents, and the socialist loyalties of youth counselors

Szold wished to place these forlorn Polish 
orphans in religious surroundings since most of their murdered families 
had been religious. However, many of these hardened 
teensage survivors did not want this. Hence, there arose the question of separating older from younger children, so that the younger children could be placed in religious settings.

Chaim Weizmann and Judah 
Magnes — took each other’s 
hand.

Rabbi Hillel Goldberg, PhD, is 
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