

**WITH NEW GOP LEADERSHIP IN PLACE,
JEWISH ACTIVISTS FACE A QUANDARY**

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- Jewish activists here are in a quandary.

When they look at Rep. Newt Gingrich's official rise to speaker of the House of Representatives this week, many activists express grave concern over his positions on domestic issues.

At the same time, however, the same folks laud him on his solid pro-Israel credentials.

It is a quandary Jewish activists say they are going to have to learn to live with in the wake of this week's election of leaders for the 104th Congress.

As expected, the Republicans, who gained control of both the House and the Senate during November's election sweep, picked Gingrich (R-Ga.) and Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kan.) to head their respective houses of Congress.

Across the aisle, Democrats elected Thomas Daschle (D-S.D.) as their minority leader in the Senate. In the House, Democratic lawmakers returned Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.), David Bonior (D-Mich.) and Vic Fazio (D-Calif.) to the top three spots. Gephardt is the House minority leader; Bonior, the minority whip; and Fazio, the Democratic caucus chair.

Dick Armey (R-Tex.) will hold the No. 2 spot as majority leader under Gingrich, and Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) will serve as the majority whip.

In the Senate, Democrats picked Wendell Ford (D-Ky.) as minority whip, the party's No. 2 position. Republicans in the Senate sharpened their turn to the right, choosing Trent Lott (R-Miss.) a conservative ally of Gingrich, as assistant majority leader.

Jewish Leaders Seek A Truce

Reacting with conciliatory and cautious comments, Jewish leaders sought to sound a truce in the war of words about the incoming Republican leadership's agenda.

Since the election, Jewish organizations have led the charge against the Republican push for balanced-budget and school-prayer amendments as well as aggressive welfare reform.

"The new leadership on the House side has made its agenda clear," said Mark Pelavin, Washington representative of the American Jewish Congress.

While that agenda is "fundamentally at odds with the American Jewish community," he said, "we will work with them when we can."

"Although we acknowledge that there will be disagreements on key domestic issues with the Republican leadership, there will be key legislation on which we will be able to work together," agreed Jess Hordes, Washington director of the Anti-Defamation League.

"But where there are differences we will not hesitate to express our opposition," Hordes said.

On the Israel agenda, "the new leadership has demonstrated clear support of Israel, and AIPAC feels well-positioned to work with them in a dramatically changed Congress in what will be

an enormous and doable task," an AIPAC spokesman said.

Gingrich, who "brought the house down" at last year's AIPAC policy conference, according to many present, led Republicans in the last Congress to two record breaking pro-Israel initiatives.

As minority whip, Gingrich secured the highest level of Republican support in the history of foreign aid and led the effort to secure Republican signatures on a September letter to President Clinton supporting a unified Jerusalem.

While Gingrich's record on Israel is praised across the board by activists, Dole has a mixed record. In the past, he has floated proposals to cut foreign aid to Israel.

However one pro-Israel official said that Dole's anticipated run for the presidency has led the incoming majority leader to sharpen his ties with the Jewish community and adopt a strong pro-Israel stance. The voting records of the remainder of the leadership on both sides of the aisle reflect a strong pro-Israel pattern with one notable exception.

Bonior, who has a large Arab American constituency, has over the years remained critical of some Israeli policies on human rights grounds. While he has not played a prominent role on foreign policy issues, Bonior has said he would support a cut in foreign aid to Israel.

**JEWISH FEMINISM IN THE '90s:
TWO DECADES AFTER PLANTING SEEDS,
JEWISH FEMINISM TRANSFORMS COMMUNITY**
[Part 1 Of A Series]
By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- More than two decades after planting its first seeds, Jewish feminism has transformed Jewish life.

What began as the demand by women for access to positions of power in the organized American Jewish world has evolved into a movement that has permeated all aspects of Jewish communal and religious life.

Not only are women changing Jewish tradition by bringing their voices and experiences to it, but they are becoming deeply connected to their Jewishness, threading it through their lives in a more personal, intimate way than some felt was possible before the advent of feminism.

There has been more success in the religious realm than the communal, say Jewish feminists.

But veteran activists in Jewish organizations point to changes there, too, including the funding of causes more reflective of women's needs.

Those involved in the movement are pausing now to reflect on the accomplishments of Jewish women as Lilith, the flagship publication of Jewish feminism, celebrates its 18th anniversary.

The coming-of-age of the magazine means that the movement has been around long enough to have witnessed and influenced an entire generation of young Jews.

Jewish feminism was born out of the convergence of two 1960s trends: contemporary feminism and an emerging ethnic consciousness.

Many of contemporary feminism's founders

-- Betty Friedan, Letty Cottin Pogrebin, Phyllis Chesler and Bella Abzug -- are Jewish. Gloria Steinem has a Jewish father.

The reason for such a high level of Jewish involvement is that "a sense of justice is mother's milk for us" as Jews, said Pogrebin, a founder of Ms. magazine, an author and activist in left-wing Jewish politics.

"When we woke up in the '60s and '70s to our own status as women, we were natural fighters, just like Jews in the civil rights movement," she said.

The founding mothers of feminism shaped a movement which at first had no explicit ethnic or religious component and was based on their experiences as mostly white, middle-class women.

But in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as ethnic identity became part of the American vernacular, two important trends emerged that helped shape what became a more specifically Jewish feminism.

The ethnic consciousness taking root in the black community was also transforming Jewish women, making them aware of their own ethnic and religious heritage.

But Jewish women found that their perspectives as Jews were not welcomed in the women's movement and encountered explicit anti-Semitism.

Just as Jews of both genders have experienced alienation throughout history, Jewish feminists found themselves without a place that was truly their own: The women's movement was not fully including them, and there was no place for them yet in the Jewish community.

Jewish Feminists Were Very Beleaguered

According to several of Jewish feminism's founders, the general women's movement tried to portray Jewish feminists as being very selfish. They said Jewish feminists were very beleaguered.

And within the Jewish community, "anyone critical of policy was really lambasted. People felt they had to move slowly," said one.

Jewish activists of the day belonged to a broad amalgamation of Jewish groups, mostly student-led, which were loosely organized under the rubric The Movement.

Organized under the auspices of the North American Jewish Students Network, The Movement included people who affiliated with havurot, Zionist groups, even the Jewish Defense League.

Some of the women who joined for the causes became feminists in the process.

Jewish women wanted to stay within Judaism and work for change rather than leave to seek new spiritual homes in religions more inclusive of women's experience.

Ezrat Nashim (Women's Help) was born out of that quest. The first feminist Jewish women's group began meeting on Manhattan's Upper West Side in 1971, and by the following year had developed an agenda: to fight for women's access to all areas of Jewish life.

In 1972 a dozen Ezrat Nashim members, including Arlene Agus, went to the annual convention of the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly and presented a list of demands for women's equality in Jewish law.

"We were not warmly welcomed," recalled Agus. But it was the "first step in a process that 11 years later led to the ordination of Conservative women."

The first National Feminist Conference was held in February 1973 in a Manhattan hotel and the second a year later.

Jewish women were beginning to think about what place they wanted to seek for themselves in the Jewish world.

"We didn't want to change Judaism, but just get a bigger piece of it," said Agus. "The goal has changed. Equality now seems like a very small part of our aspirations."

Lilith magazine, designed to give an independent voice to Jewish women whose experiences received scant attention in other publications, came out of discussions held there.

Published out of tiny, book-filled offices in midtown Manhattan, the quarterly magazine serves as an advocate of Jewish women's perspectives, a resource center and a link among Jewish women.

The magazine is named after the first woman created by God, a woman, who, according to rabbinic sources, demanded equality with Adam.

Over the past 18 years, the magazine has devoted its pages to topics not often addressed in other Jewish publications: rituals reflecting women's experiences; the insidiousness of the Jewish American Princess stereotype; the philanthropic power of Jewish women; and women's roles in Jewish organizations.

Lilith's tiny staff fields dozens of calls and letters each week from women who are looking for information about starting a Rosh Chodesh group or are trying to find a feminist seder to attend.

Lilith's founders had two goals, according to Executive Editor Susan Weidman Schneider: to provide a feminist voice for Jewish women who were feeling excluded by patriarchal Judaism, and to provide a Jewish voice in general women's circles.

A Rude Awakening

The effort on both fronts, said Schneider, has been successful.

"Today we hear less and less urging to walk away from the patriarchal system, that 'Judaism killed the goddess,' and less scapegoating of Judaism" by feminists in spiritual circles, she said.

"Lilith is a real open door for unaffiliated Jewish women," said Schneider. Before the magazine existed, "each woman thought she was alone. Lilith helped eradicate some of the sense of isolation."

The first United Nations conference on women, held in Mexico City in 1975, was a rude awakening for Jewish feminists.

The concept of equating Zionism with racism was introduced to the international community and easily passed as a resolution by the delegates to the conference.

Later that year it was passed by the U.N.'s General Assembly.

The Mexico City experience "woke up a lot of non-identified Jews in the women's movement that a whole other piece of their identity politics was being Jewish," said Pogrebin.

In the years since then, a second generation of Jewish feminists has begun to mobilize.

These young Jewish women have grown up with an integrated identity of being both Jewish and feminist, rather than struggling to mesh the two.

**LITTLE PROGRESS ON PEACE WITH SYRIA
AS CHRISTOPHER WRAPS UP SIXTH SHUTTLE**
By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher appeared to make little progress in his attempt to break the impasse in Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations this week.

"I don't as yet clearly see a considerable improvement in positions," Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin told reporters after meeting with Christopher on Wednesday. "We need to see an easing in media hype before we can get to technical matters and substantial ones."

Christopher, making his sixth round of regional shuttle diplomacy this year, arrived in Israel on Tuesday following some four hours of talks with Assad in Damascus the day before.

Israeli-Syrian negotiations have been deadlocked for months over a demand from Damascus that Israel withdraw completely from the Golan Heights. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has spoken of a partial Israeli withdrawal but first wants Damascus to spell out the type of peace it would establish in return.

Israel and Syria appeared to agree on only one thing this week: to ease the heated rhetoric against each other that has marked the two leaders' recent public statements.

Rabin said both Israel and Syria will refrain from making "bombastic" public statements which are serving only to block progress in the U.S.-brokered negotiations.

Christopher tried to put a positive spin on his mission.

"I feel that there are real opportunities to reach a peace agreement between Israel and Syria," he said.

"What I can say is that there's a great seriousness of purpose on the part of both parties, the Syrians as well as the Israelis."

After meeting with Rabin, Christopher traveled on to the Gaza Strip to see Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat, where their talks focused on the financial aid Arafat seeks for his cash-strapped Palestinian Authority.

They also reportedly discussed security issues in light of the growing number of terror attacks against Israelis by the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement.

Arafat Addresses Security Concerns

Earlier this week, Christopher referred to the issue of security as the main obstacle to an Israeli-Palestinian peace.

The Christopher-Arafat accord came as Israeli and Palestinian negotiators wrapped up two days of talks in Cairo. The Cairo talks focused on implementation of the next stage of self-rule. No significant progress was reported.

In a news conference after his meeting with Christopher, Arafat said Israel and the Palestinians must continue implementing the next phase of the self-rule accord, which centers on an Israeli withdrawal of army troops from the West Bank and on the holding of Palestinian elections.

Arafat also addressed Israeli security concerns. "We are looking to have very quickly the election, but at the same time, we are keeping in our concentration the needs of security for the Israelis and we are ready to discuss it," he said.

Christopher tried to dispel rumors that Rabin

has been trying to delay implementation of the next phase of the self-rule accord, saying that Rabin had given him assurances that he is committed to the accord.

**CLINTON TAPS RUBIN FOR TREASURY;
POSTING ADDS SECOND JEW TO CABINET**
By Jennifer Batog

WASHINGTON, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- President Clinton this week tapped economic adviser Robert Rubin to replace Lloyd Bentsen as secretary of the treasury, making Rubin the second Jewish member in Clinton's Cabinet.

Although Rubin has not been a key leader in Washington on Jewish issues, observers welcomed his appointment and said Rubin has always maintained good ties with the community.

"He has always been involved in the Jewish community and always been sensitive to the Jewish community's issues," said Monte Friedkin, national chairman of the National Jewish Democratic Committee.

Jewish leaders praised Rubin's work as the head of the National Economic Council, a position which gave him "a direct path to the Oval Office," Friedkin said.

"He clearly is an extraordinarily capable administrator and policy-maker," said David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

Rubin, who advises Clinton on economic matters, is known for his pro-Israel stance and as a strong proponent of free trade and restrained government spending.

Bentsen was described by many as a longtime friend of the Jewish community.

**A JEHOVAH'S WITNESS APPEALS TO COURT
ON RIGHT TO REFUSE MEDICAL TREATMENT**
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- A Haifa resident who is a Jehovah's Witness has appealed to the High Court of Justice to overturn a lower court's decision forcing her to undergo a blood transfusion, a medical procedure which is against her religious beliefs.

While the High Court has previously ruled on the right of terminally ill patients to refuse medical care, it has never dealt with the rights of non-terminal patients.

Ella Coritini, 31, was hospitalized in Haifa last month with intestinal ulcers.

She agreed to a doctor-recommended operation but stipulated that should not she be administered a blood transfusion, even if her life was in danger.

The hospital objected to that condition, and the District Court upheld the hospital's view, saying that Coritini could refuse the transfusion only as long as she was conscious.

But if she were unconscious, as is always the case when a general anesthetic is required, the hospital could perform a transfusion if necessary, according to the court.

Although no transfusion was in fact required when the operation was performed, Coritini filed an appeal with the High Court. She said she took the step to obtain a ruling that would govern medical procedures in the future for herself and other members of her religion.

**PERES PROPOSES REGIONAL BODY
IN MEETING WITH ARAB NEIGHBORS**

By Agnes Bohm

BUDAPEST, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, meeting here this week with his counterparts from Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria, proposed the formation of a body for regional cooperation among Mediterranean countries based on a European model.

The five leaders met Monday within the framework of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, a body created in the 1970s to discuss East-West security issues. The CSCE includes all the countries of Europe as well as the United States and Canada.

The five foreign ministers reportedly agreed that the new body, which would be known as the Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Middle East, could help promote economic cooperation and could assist in the fight against terrorism.

They agreed to hold future meetings every six months.

Israel earlier this year established low-level diplomatic ties with Morocco and Tunisia, and it has full relations with Egypt.

But there are no Israeli-Algerian ties, and according to a spokeswoman for Peres, this week's meeting marked the first time that foreign ministers of the two countries were ever in the same room together.

The Monday meeting also fueled Israeli news reports that Israel and Algeria are close to developing some form of relations.

The Hebrew daily Yediot Achronot reported that the Algerian government has officially informed the Israeli Foreign Ministry and Prime Minister's Office of plans to let Israelis visit their country.

The process, according to the report, would begin with allowing Israeli delegations of athletes, businesspeople and scientists to attend international gatherings in Algeria.

The new openness, the paper said, would also extend to expatriate Algerian Jews, who until now have been able to visit Algeria using only French passports.

Members of the Algerian community in Israel welcomed the possibility of diplomatic ties with Algiers.

But they said it was unlikely they would visit Algeria, where the government has been fighting a bloody battle against Islamic fundamentalist groups in recent years.

A Foreign Ministry official, however, dismissed the news report, saying Algeria has made no gesture toward warming ties, nor does it seem likely to do so in the near future.

(JTA correspondent Naomi Segal in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

WANT TO BET THIS ALLIGATOR IS REAL?

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- A man came close to being lunch for an alligator this week after he jumped into the alligator and crocodile compound at the Hamat Gader Hot Springs, located south of Tiberias, to settle a bet that the reptiles were not for real.

Site manager Ronni Lothan said the visitor

had taken a branch and started beating the tail of a 12-foot-long alligator lying in the grass.

The reptile suddenly turned its head and snapped at the intruder, who jumped back and climbed over a fence, with all body parts intact.

Lothan said the fact that it was winter, when the reptiles' metabolism drops and slows their reactions, probably prevented a more gruesome outcome.

"Had this happened in the summer, when the alligators and crocodiles in the park are alert and react with lightning speed, he wouldn't have stood a chance," Lothan was quoted as saying in the Jerusalem Post.

The manager said there were more than 200 alligators and crocodiles lying motionless in the compound at the time.

TWO SOLDIERS KILLED IN ACCIDENT

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- Two Israeli soldiers were killed and another critically hurt this week in a training accident at a military base located in central Israel.

Capt. Shmuel Ben Gershon, 21, of Jerusalem, and Staff Sgt. Moshe Cohen, 24, of Bat Yam, were killed in the accident Tuesday and were buried Wednesday.

An officer who was seriously hurt in the accident was hospitalized.

The army is investigating the circumstances surrounding the incident.

Israel Defense Force sources told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee this week that 17 soldiers were killed in IDF training accidents during 1993.

A military source said that in the past year the army has been reviewing safety regulations for training exercises.

MAN JAILED FOR RESISTING DIVORCE DIES

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- An 82-year-old man who had been in prison for 32 years for refusing to give his wife a get, or a religious bill of divorce, died Monday after suffering a cerebral hemorrhage while still in jail.

For three decades, Yihye Avraham has refused to grant the divorce, explaining that he loved, and still loves, his wife, Ora.

Jewish law stipulates that both husband and wife must agree to a divorce, although only a man can actually give the get.

Israeli law allows imprisonment as a method of last resort to put pressure on a stubborn spouse.

The couple was married in their native country of Yemen when Ora was 12 and Yihye was 28. She bore him two daughters, but he reportedly berated her and abused her for not bearing sons.

Prison services spokesman Dubi Ben-Ami said husbands who refuse to grant a divorce are rarely jailed, and even then only for short periods.

"To our knowledge there has never been a case even resembling this one," he said.

Reminder: There will be no JTA Daily News Bulletin published Friday, Dec. 9.
