On the way to Damascus, Saul became Paul. An orthodox Jewish rabbi became the foremost apostle of Jesus Christ. Saul was blinded by a sudden light from heaven and struck to the ground. Jesus appeared to him in person and talked to him. Something like this happened to Ezer Weizman on the way to Cairo. No sudden light came down from heaven, and the person who appeared to him was no apparition from another world. He was a human being—Anwar el-Sadat.

Actually, it happened in Jerusalem, when the Egyptian president was on his fateful visit to the Holy City. Having met all the important leaders of Israel, he asked to see Ezer Weizman. When Sadat was on his way to Israel, Weizman was in the hospital. Two days earlier he had had a road accident. He was on his way from Tel Aviv, where the Ministry of Defense is located, to Jerusalem, in order to demand from Menachem Begin the immediate dismissal of the chief of the general staff, General Mordecai Gur. Upon hearing that President Sadat intended to come to Jerusalem, Gur had publicly voiced his suspicion that this was a ruse to disguise preparations for a surprise attack on Israel. Weizman was incensed. On the way to Jerusalem the minister’s driver suddenly swerved to avoid an Arab pedestrian. The car landed in a ditch and Weizman in a hospital.

Weizman was painfully injured, but will power was stronger than pain. The doctors pumped him full of injections. When Sadat spoke in the Knesset, Weizman was there. The next morning Sadat asked to meet Weizman privately. Weizman entered Sadat’s room in the King David Hotel, dragging himself painfully on a walking-stick. When he saw the president, he drew himself up and presented arms; using the stick as a rifle, he said: “I salute you for winning the Yom Kippur war.” It was a typical Weizman gesture—totally spontaneous, sincere, exuberant, yet shrewdly calculated to strike the heart of the man he was talking to. Weizman had done it a thousand times before: to captains, generals, sergeants, politicians, and pretty girls.

Anwar el-Sadat, a man with the traditional Arab respect for gestures, was won over. He liked this man. He was impressed by the tribute of the Israeli minister of defense, the real architect of Israel’s 1967 victory, who complimented him so simply and sincerely on his own greatest achievement—the crossing of the Canal in October, 1973, the Ramadan War.

If ever two people met and liked each other on sight it was these two. The Egyptian made no human contact with Menachem Begin, the politician from Brest Litovsk, in spite of the journalistic prattle about “positive chemical reactions.” He instinctively disliked Moshe Dayan,
the most famous of the Israeli leadership group, who disappointed him. But in Weizman he saw a man to his liking, a professional soldier like himself, a man with an open mind and an uninhibited style.

Weizman mentioned that his only son had been severely wounded in the head on the Suez Canal seven years earlier. Sadat answered that his step-brother, a pilot, was killed in the 1973 war. A bond was established. After the meeting Weizman staggered to his own room in the same hotel. Entering, he fell to his knees, unable to control the pain.

Later that day, after taking his leave at the entrance of the King David Hotel, Sadat was already seated in his limousine when he spied Weizman at a distance sitting in a wheel chair. The president jumped out of his car, went up to the minister and hugged him. From then on he spoke frequently about “my friend Ezra Weizman.” It took him several months to get the name correct—perhaps because Ezra is a common Jewish name in Egypt, while Ezer is not. Ten days after the meeting Ezer was on his way to Egypt. A friendship had been established, but something much more important had happened to Ezer Weizman himself. One of the most extreme hawks in Israel had become a dove, a potential leader of Israel’s peace movement. It seemed like a miraculous conversion indeed.

Can a man really change so profoundly at the age of fifty-three? How serious can such a conversion be?

For people who knew only the public image of Ezer Weizman his sudden metamorphosis seemed stunning. A man who had devoted his life to fighting Arabs, who for decades had preached expansion and annexation, who, only in 1975, had published a book prophesying an inevitable new war: How could he embrace a new political philosophy, going far beyond the cautious hopes of many doves in Israel?

Ezer Weizman was born in Haifa on June 15, 1924, but he grew up in Haifa. If there exists anything like an aristocracy in what later became Israel, Ezer belonged to it from birth. This typical “sabra” had a most unusual background.

The typical sabra of the time was poor. His only language was Hebrew, which virtually cut him off from the world. Hebrew books were few, translations bad. A private car was a dream, telephones rare; a trip from Haifa to Tel Aviv was a big journey, a trip abroad well-nigh impossible.

Ezer Weizman was born rich. His father, a well-to-do agronomist and entrepreneur, was the brother of the most famous Jew of that time: the legendary Chaim Weizmann, world-renowned chemist, the president of the Zionist Movement, the friend of world leaders, the father of the Balfour Declaration. All the numerous members of the Weizmann clan were shrewd, humorous people, addicted to eating, drinking, and joking.

In contrast, Moshe Dayan grew up in conditions of utmost poverty, Yitzhak Rabin and Ariel Sharon in families with limited means. None of these knew any language but Hebrew, no one of them ever came into real contact with Arabs, except casual meetings in the fields or streets. Before they were adults, no one of them had ever been outside Palestine, then a small country on the outskirts of the British Empire.

Ezer was lucky. On Saturdays his father might take him in the family car to have lunch in Beirut, perhaps even in Damascus. More often they would visit rich Arabs in Acre or the village elders in the Galilee, with whom his father, Yechezkel, had business dealings. Ezer knew and liked Arabs from his earliest childhood—Haifa itself being the only really mixed town in Palestine then—and this sympathy for things Arab found clear expression in the childhood chapters of his autobiography, written at a time when he was Ezer the Superhawk.

Another early influence was, of course, Uncle Chaim. When the Zionist president came to visit the family home at No. 4, Lord Melchett Street, Haifa, in what was then the aristocratic part of the Jewish quarter, he brought with him a whirl of fresh air from the great world, from places like London and Paris and New York. He also brought with him the legends of his political life, his desert meeting with Emir Feisal, the leader of the Hashemite army in World War I, the friend of Lawrence of Arabia. Weizmann, the great moderate, believed in reaching an agreement with the Arabs and even entertained dreams of Jewish-Arab cooperation in building a new Middle East.

When Ezer was eight years old, his father took him on a tour of Europe, including England—something unheard of for a sabra in those days. English, as well as Hebrew and Yiddish, was spoken in the home. These childhood memories are embedded in Ezer Weizman’s mind. They are fertile soil for new ideas and insights.

Ezer attended the “Real Gymnasium”—the famous Haifa secondary school that took great pride in its Prussian spirit. He seems to have been an indifferent scholar. His teacher recalls: “He had the shifty eyes of a crook. He never excelled in diligence.” He was more interested in wars and fighting, to which he was exposed at an early age. In 1929, while his parents were in England, riots broke out in Palestine. "Shut the windows, people are shooting,” five-year-old Ezer told his aunt. In kindergarten he wrote a poem: “Juda Maccabee/a hero was he/ta-ra-la-la...” Weizman hotly denies having added the “tara-la-la.”

When he finished school in 1942, World War II was at its climax. The world admired the few fighter pilots of the RAF and Ezer Weizman dreamed of becoming one of them. He was able to afford a private flying license—another nearly unheard of luxury—and volunteered for the RAF. But he ended up doing the same thing as many thousands of other Jewish boys in Palestine who volunteered for other units of the British forces in order to fight Hitler: driving a lorry in the western desert of Egypt.

Finally, and nearly too late, he was accepted for pilot school. During his years as RAF pilot the young Ezer acquired some of the mannerisms of this group—a flamboyant exuberance coupled with an engaging directness that became his trade-mark. But he learned much more in the RAF: how to organize his thoughts, how to reach logical conclusions, and, of course, how a modern air
force works—a lesson he was to need very soon, when war broke out in Palestine.

For all young Israelis of that period it was a time of expectation. Menachem Begin’s “Irgun” and the “Stern Gang” fought against the British, and the “Haganah” broke the British blockade to bring in illegal immigrants.

Ezer spent this period in England studying aeronautics. He states in his book, On Eagles’ Wings: “I never was a member of the Irgun, nor of the Palmach in the accepted sense.” He flirted briefly with the Irgun in Europe and even assisted in an unsuccessful plan to assassinate General Barker, who had been commander of the British troops in Palestine and had aroused bitter hatred when he published an order of the day with clear anti-Semitic undertones (“Hit the Jews in the pocket”). When war broke out in Palestine in November, 1947, Ezer joined the Haganah forces that soon became the Israeli army.

Weizman’s career in the Israeli Defense Army from the end of 1947 to the end of 1969 is the story of the Israeli Air Force. Starting as a pilot of one of the four Piper Cubs that constituted the whole Air Force in the beginning of 1948, he flew Messerschmidts and Spitfires during the war, became the leader of the only fighter squadron and commander of the biggest Air Force base. After the Sinai War of 1956 he was appointed commander of the Air Force, a job he held until the eve of the Six-Day War of 1967.

As commander he was an outstanding success, the idol of his men, and object of imitation. He looked like a simple soldier, with the gift of making friends and inspiring love: a big mouth, spouting jokes, curses, exhortations, and praise; an ebullient if rather naughty extrovert, the bane of his superiors, hero of his subordinates. Yet, as his book shows, behind this natural exuberance there lay much thoughtfulness. His behavior is spontaneous, but also well reasoned as a code for command.

There was more to it than that. Tough decisions had to be made: What kind of air force to build, what doctrine to adopt, and how to invest the limited resources of the force? Weizman decided to build an air force devoted almost exclusively to one paramount task: to destroy the Arab air forces on the ground in the first few hours of the war. It was a courageous decision and required a commander with a great talent for convincing and cajoling in order to drag along his civilian and military superiors, who were loath to mortgage the fortunes of war in advance by shaping this kind of air force. Weizman promised to destroy the Arab air forces within six hours, and precious few believed him. Actually, it was accomplished in three hours, on June 5, 1967. That was how the war was won.

But Weizman was not there to reap the fruits of his decisions. In 1966 he had been promoted to chief of operations, the number-two job in the Army. In this role he played a major part in forcing Prime Minister Levi Eshkol to start the war and in conducting overall operations. He always regretted that he was not in command of the Air Force on the day his theories were put to the test. “I sow, others reap,” he once commented sadly.

On the eve of the war the chief of staff, Yitzhak Rabin, had a nervous breakdown, the disclosure of which episode was later to become the cause of a bitter feud between the two men. Ezer took over command for a day or two, and his decisions were approved by the prime minister. When Rabin relinquished his job after victory, Ezer hoped to become chief of staff, but his friend and rival, Haim Bar-Lev, got the job. This highest prize for every Israeli officer has eluded Ezer Weizman. When he finally despaired of achieving it, he was ready for something new. It came to him quite suddenly, in December, 1969. At the age of forty-five General Ezer Weizman turned, virtually overnight, from a regular soldier into a cabinet minister, politician, and party leader.

Ezer Weizman was not content to produce technically proficient pilots—“the best in the world,” as he believes. He spent a lot of his time on political indoctrination, instilling in the men of the Air Force an ardent desire for the incorporation of the West Bank into Israel, and this was long before the Six-Day War. For him the conquest of the West Bank and Sinai was but the fulfillment of Israel’s manifest destiny. Yet, at the same time, he had an incongruous, even romantic, liking for Arabs. This is repeatedly reflected in his book in a number of random sentences that seem quite unpremeditated; e.g., in reporting on a bombing mission in the south during the 1948 war, he writes: “A sight which does not please the eyes, and even pulls at the heart strings, is the long line of Arab refugees trekking behind the retreating Egyptian Army, with their bundles of meagre belongings”—a highly untypical phrase during those bitter days of mutual hatred.

In 1950 Ezer was sent to the British Royal Air Force Staff College, the first Israeli officer to attend. One of his classmates was Wing Commander “Jimmy” Affifi, later to become deputy commander of the Egyptian Air Force. There they became close friends and remained friends, even after the Six-Day War, when Air Marshal Affifi was court-martialed for the unpreparedness of the Egyptian Air Force, which, just as according to Ezer’s plan, was destroyed on the ground. Affifi was acquitted.

The sudden transformation of the general into a cabinet minister, which amazed the country and shocked many, took place under highly unusual circumstances.

Menachem Begin and his followers had entered the cabinet in 1967 on the eve of the Six-Day War without accepting portfolios. When a new cabinet was formed by Golda Meir after the 1969 elections, the Herut party entered as a formal coalition partner and received portfolios. Some of the Herut bosses offered Ezer, clandestinely, the job of minister of transport, which is also responsible for aviation. Weizman accepted and was asked not to contact Begin in any way. The arrangement was hidden from the leader because, it was assumed, the formalistic Begin would disapprove political negotiations with a general in active service. Only at the very last moment was Begin informed about the appointment, and he accepted it gracefully. On that very day
Weizman was discharged from the Army and joined the Herut party—the first party membership of his life. Weizman remained in this office only eight months. In August, 1970, Begin took his party out of the government because Golda Meir used the word "withdrawal" in a diplomatic note to the U.S. secretary of state, William Rogers. The use of the detested term had been deemed necessary for putting an end to the war of attrition that had been raging along the Suez Canal for some time. In party meetings Weizman spoke against Begin's decision, but voted for it out of loyalty. Had he voted otherwise, Begin would have been defeated.

A few weeks later Ezer was elected chairman of the Herut party executive committee, the No. 2 post in the party—much to the chagrin of No. 1, Begin himself, who favored another candidate. It was all part of the highly ambivalent relationship between the two. Weizman's first act upon entering his office in the top floor of the party building in Tel Aviv created consternation: He removed from the wall the portrait of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the revered founder of the Movement, and put it in a cupboard. Ezer has only maps on his walls, never pictures.

The new chairman visited party branches throughout the country, systematically removing the oldtimers who happened to be ex-Irgun members and Begin devotees, supplanting them with up-to-date youngsters. This was a mistake and showed how naive Ezer still was. "A political baby," one of his friends later commented sadly.

Herut had always been a one-man show, more commanded than led by Begin, the ex-leader of the Irgun underground, who was surrounded by a closely knit group of ex-Irgun officers fanatically devoted to him. Ezer did not read this map. On the eve of the 1972 party conference he was certain he had the majority with him. Suddenly Begin hit back, with the consummate skill of an old party fox. Using obscure sections of the party statute, which Ezer had never read, Begin dispersed committees, appointed delegates, prohibited secret ballots. By a show of hands, 60 per cent of the delegates supported Begin. Ezer got up and resigned, calling Ezer "mon général," and "a nice naughty kid."

The breach was complete. Ezer took no part in the second important event of course, the Yom Kippur War. Kulitz, who is religious, was praying in the synagogue. At 9 A.M. his nonreligious wife called him out: "Ezer wants you to phone him." Only a world-shattering event would induce anyone to ask a religious Jew to phone on Yom Kippur. Ezer rapidly told his friend that he had just received a call from a friend in the Ministry of Defense. Reliable information had been received that the Egyptians were mounting a surprise attack at 6 P.M. "But they are not! They will attack at noon!" Ezer added.

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This time difference was to prove fateful. The necessary moves to defend the Bar-Lev Line as planned for such an emergency were timed by the general staff for a 6 P.M. H-Hour. When the attack began at 2 P.M., those moves were incomplete, making the disaster an even greater one. How did Ezer know? He was a private citizen, a businessman at the time. He had no special information. But he knew the facts of air power. And he could guess at the calculations of the Egyptian commander: The Egyptian Army needed a few hours of daylight to cross the Canal and gain a foothold on the Eastern Bank, and would then utilize the darkness for

For four years Weizman was in exile—out of the Army, out of politics. For the first time in his adult life he really was a private citizen. It was a comfortable exile. With his former assistant, David Kulitz, he founded a commercial enterprise dealing in arms and military equipment, which proved to be highly profitable.

During those years of rapid change for Ezer, two things happened that were to influence him profoundly and have a bearing on his seeming transformation. The first occurred while he was still in government. On June 29, 1970, a few weeks before the end of the war of attrition Shaul Weizman was hit in the head at the Suez Canal and the fragment of a shell was lodged in his brain. Ezer, then still a minister, claims that he had had a premonition of this. He was sitting in the Knesset cafeteria, when an usher said that the chief of staff wanted him on the phone. As he walked the few paces to the instrument he was thinking feverishly: "It must be Shaul. Chaim [Bar-Lev] has no other cause to call me. He can't have been killed because Chaim would not tell me this on the phone. So he must be wounded." When he picked up the receiver, he heard Bar-Lev's notoriously slow voice announcing: "Ezer, it's Shaul..."

While his son was flown to a hospital in Israel, Ezer drove out to receive him. He carried the stretcher. The terrible ordeal lasted days, weeks, even years. Brain surgery was successful, but the human brain in a complicated organ and recovery may take a long time. No father could take his son's injury harder than Ezer Weizman. It cast a shadow on his whole life for years.

After the operation Ezer asked himself how to express his gratitude to the surgeon. In the end he had a poem by a favorite Israeli writer copied out on parchment, and he presented it to him. The poem is dedicated to the army doctors, and ends with the words: "You repair the mistakes of the statesman, the general/And cancel the orders sent by the devil to the grave-digger..." The idea that the statesmen and the generals make war inevitable is one that has pursued Weizman since then. Even in his hawkish book he asked repeatedly: "Where did we fail? When Shaul was born, I was certain that he would never have to fight. What went wrong?"

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consolidating the bridgeheads without harassment by the Israeli Air Force. Weizman was right.

During the war, while the wings of his beloved Air Force were being clipped by ground-to-air missiles, Ezer was nearly de trop, accompanying the chief of staff and advising him on air matters. In the wake of the war all Israelis underwent a spell of soul searching. Ezer was no exception. "I, too, had my share in creating an atmosphere of arrogance toward the Arabs," he confessed, and called upon the nation to "start rethinking."

Weizman had no illusions about the real outcome of the war: "From a political point of view, we lost the war. We entered it as a power, we came out of it a defeated nation." It was the beginning of a gradual reassessment. Soon afterwards, when the Likud bloc violently opposed the interim agreements with Egypt and Syria, Weizman, who was still a party member, came out publicly in their support.

One result of the Yom Kippur War was the downfall of the Golda/Dayan government and the emergence of Yitzhak Rabin, who had been chief of staff when Ezer was No. 2 in the Army. When Rabin was about to become prime minister, an embarrassing incident occurred: Ezer published a document revealing that Rabin had suffered a nervous breakdown during the crucial days before outbreak of the Six-Day War. It initiated a bitter argument. At that time Rabin was enjoying considerable popularity as someone who had not been involved in the Yom Kippur disaster. Many people believed Weizman had acted out of spite.

Weizman himself thought he was fulfilling a duty in warning the nation that Rabin could not be relied upon in periods of extreme stress. He told Kulitz beforehand: "If Rabin is appointed minister of defense, I shall not reveal the episode, because then he will not be in supreme command. If he is about to become prime minister, I have no choice." The episode left behind a bitter aftertaste, and the breach between the two friends who respected each other in many ways has not yet healed.

Business was good, but Ezer's heart was not in it. He pined for personal involvement in the affairs of the nation. After publication of his book in 1975, the Herut party celebrated its appearance. Menachem Begin came to the celebration. It was the beginning of reconciliation. Weizman told his party, "I am back." A year later a delegation of Likud bosses offered Weizman the job of campaign manager in the forthcoming general elections. Weizman was not highly tempted and placed strict conditions for his acceptance: he was to be in complete charge, no one was to interfere. Nothing was said or done that could frighten away voters.

Weizman probably would have been unable to prevent Begin from voicing his intransigent superhawkish beliefs, if the leader had not been suddenly laid low by a severe heart attack. During the crucial stage of the campaign Begin, struggling with death, could take no part in it. Recuperating, Begin could not prevent Weizman from presenting him as a benign grandfather playing with his grandchildren, a moderate and well-meaning elder statesman, eager to do good and to replace the Labor party hacks.

The magnitude of the Likud victory was totally unexpected, except by Weizman himself. He had the effrontery to send two of his friends to Shimon Peres, on the eve of the campaign, secretly to invite him to join the Likud in time. During the long night following the balloting, Begin would not believe the computer forecasts. Until the early hours of morning he refused to make a victory statement, fearing that the vision of victory would prove a mirage. He had lost eight previous election campaigns. It must have been galling to admit that he owed this victory, on the ninth try, to Ezer Weizman.

Begin was certainly in no mood to appoint Weizman to the crucial Defense Ministry. He played with the idea of giving the post to Ariel Sharon, the turbulent ex-Army general. Only when he was convinced that the
Likud would not stand for this (Sharon had run in the elections at the head of a separate list, had suffered a defeat, and joined the Likud the next day) did Begin turn the ministry over to Weizman.

However, during the first months of the new government Moshe Dayan was Begin's favorite, the obvious No. 2 man in the cabinet. By an unparalleled feat of political betrayal, Dayan had left the Labor party on the morrow of the elections in which he had been elected to the Knesset as a Labor member. In Israel the minister of defense has always overshadowed the foreign minister. Now, for the first time, it appeared that the reverse had become true. During those first five months Weizman was content to concentrate on his ministry, which badly needed new leadership. Begin operated in a state of euphoria and was gaining popularity. There was no sign that something momentous was about to happen until, in November, Sadat decided to pay his historic visit to Jerusalem.

Three people were facing Sadat in Jerusalem: Menachem Begin, Moshe Dayan, and Ezer Weizman. They could not have been more different from each other. Their reactions at that historical moment and their relations with Sadat reflected their characters and backgrounds.

The most striking difference is that between Begin and Weizman. It might be a simplification to say that one is a Jew, the other an Israeli. Weizman himself who, for many years, never missed an opportunity to stress his Jewishness and his Zionism, certainly would object to such a definition. Nevertheless, it is basically true. Weizman is a sabra, pure and simple. Begin was twenty-eight years old when he first set foot on the soil of Palestine. Weizman, when asked about his earliest childhood memories, answers: "The smell of thyme on the Carmel hills." It is an Arab smell. No one can guess at the childhood smells of Mr. Begin, son of a small Jewish functionary in Brest Litovsk in eastern Poland.

For Weizman, Arabs are a familiar part of his world. He talked with them as a boy, fought against them, understands them, likes them. For Begin, Arabs are an unfamiliar and, therefore, slightly sinister race. Until he met Sadat he had not once in his life had a serious conversation with an Arab. But there is more to it. Begin, who studied but never practiced law, is a proto-type of the spoiled lawyer. He attaches immense importance to written documents, formulations, and exact phrasing.

Weizman could not care less about any document. Formulations do not interest him. "If the peace takes hold, the phrasing of the peace treaty will quickly become obsolete. If the peace fails, the treaty is unimportant." He has the soldier's eye for the essential and no patience for side issues. "You cannot assure peace for future generations. You can only launch a process. If there is no peace, war is certain to come—sooner or later. But about peace nothing is certain. You can demand all kinds of security arrangements and guarantees, but, in the end, it all depends on whether the peace takes hold or not."

When Begin formulates something, as he loves to do, one must read it several times, look for hidden meanings between the lines. There is no hidden meaning in anything Weizman writes or says. It may be easier for a soldier than for a politician to change his views. A politician becomes attached to his slogans. They are the instruments of his trade. Begin has been brought up on an ideology. He has preached it throughout his adult life. Faced with the historic chance to achieve something else—peace instead of a Greater Israel—he could not budge.

A soldier must read maps. For him recognizing facts is a precondition of success. In a war, fortune may change within minutes, compelling the soldier to readjust his plans and ideas in a moment. When Sadat arrived, Weizman realized in a flash that everything had changed. "Let's put our heads under the cold-water tap and start thinking," he told his friends once he became convinced that Sadat was serious.

The difference between Weizman and Dayan is less obvious, more sophisticated. Both are sabras, and for many years they were brothers-in-law, until Dayan divorced his first wife, Ruth, widening the gulf between himself and the husband of Ruth's sister.

The difference between the two is not only the result of their different childhood circumstances—Dayan's narrow world of the Moshav, and Weizman's comparatively cosmopolitan rich boys' world. Weizman is nine years younger than Dayan—a big difference when they were young. He has the self-assurance of a tall boy who has always been popular. Dayan is short and never was comfortable with boys of his own age.

Dayan is a loner. Like Begin, he has no friends, no advisors. Much more than Begin, he is devoid of any human contact. His complete lack of loyalty to anyone and anything is a central attribute of his character. Weizman is the exact opposite. He enjoys human contact, practically wallows in it. He is intensely loyal to his subordinates, once deferring an important promotion for himself for several years because the minister of defense refused to appoint as his successor the man he had recommended. Unlike Dayan, he is a family man who takes immense trouble with family members and relatives. He loves people and evokes their love.

For many years Dayan had assiduously cultivated the idea that he was "the man who can talk with the Arabs." But Sadat neither liked nor trusted Dayan, and during his historic visit practically shut him out, turning Dayan into an adversary. To the surprise of many, Weizman turned out to be the man who, indeed, "could talk with the Arabs." Weizman's own explanation is quite simple: "In order to speak with an Arab, or a Chinese, you do not have to speak Arabic or Chinese; you have to be a human being." The unspoken implication: that's exactly what Dayan is not.

Dayan is an introvert. Weizman an extrovert. Dayan has been all his life a No. 2 man: first to Ben-Gurion, then to Golda, now to Begin. Behind the outward appearance of self-assurance and resoluteness, Dayan is basically a hesitating type, unable to make up his mind in crucial situations, contradicting himself frequently. He needs a superior to make up his mind for him in a real test. Weizman is the born commander, a man who
enjoys making decisions. He has his own system of doing this, asking everybody about his ideas, encouraging everybody to state his opinions, getting as many points of view as possible, and then making up his mind. Unlike Dayan, he is always surrounded by friends and advisors, but he is also likely to interrogate strangers and opponents who may have some special information or ideas, asking incessantly: "What do you think about this? What do you think about that?" Typically, when the cabinet has to decide on policy, Dayan comes with nary a sheet of paper. Weizman arrives with a big file of background material and analyses prepared by his staff.

There is a paradox about Weizman the politician. A typical politician is a person who always looks serious, even if quite often he is not. The trouble with Weizman is that he is much more serious than he looks. He is very much aware of this fact. In his book he recounts many conversations with himself, in which he admonishes himself, showers good advice on himself, and says things like "Weizman, pull yourself together....Weizman, shut your big mouth...."

His natural ebullience, his open nature, his famous gift for bons mots and invective, his total inability to keep quiet, his urge to voice his opinion even when he knows that it is going to irritate and anger his superiors—all these have created an image of an attractive, even charismatic, but not quite serious personality.

This impression is quite erroneous. There is an underlying streak of seriousness inherent in his character. This is amply proved by the seriousness of his achievements in the past: the building of the Air Force, the planning of the decisive air strike of June, 1967, the Likud election campaign of 1977. Like Dayan and unlike Begin, Weizman is not an intellectual. He reads books, mostly biographies, but enjoys far more talking to people. In serious conversations people are surprised to hear from him ideas they did not expect to be there. His inquisitive mind strikes out.

Here lies, perhaps, the greatest difference between Ezer and his colleagues. Like the commander of an armored division who sees a small break in the opposing front line and rushes forward with all his might, Weizman immediately understood the historic implications of the Sadat opening. His mind jumped ahead, grasping the essentials. While both Begin and Dayan were quibbling about phrases and formulas, Weizman was ready to advance with full speed, coming to grips with the main problems, realizing the possibility of changing the course of history by big, dramatic acts. It is there that Sadat's and Weizman's concepts meet.

Between the fateful meeting in the King David Hotel and the more recent meeting in Salzburg, Weizman has talked with Sadat seven times, during five visits to Egypt. From each of these he returned convinced that the Egyptians really want peace, exhilarated by the vistas he saw opening before Israel. Each time he has come back to the cabinet dominated by the immovable Mr. Begin and consisting of plodding nobodies who cannot imagine a different reality. Moving back and forth between two worlds, his frustration has been growing, sometimes leading to despair.

He had been invited to Egypt immediately after Sadat's Jerusalem visit, when the Egyptian president decided that Begin's unresponsive speech in the Knesset did not warrant a reciprocal visit to Egypt by the prime minister. Dayan was not even considered. Later, when Begin and Dayan were invited to the abortive Ismailia conference, they did not want to take Weizman along. Only at the last moment did Begin decide that the exclusion of Weizman was impossible because of the participation of the Egyptian minister of war.

There the differences became visual: Begin closeted with Sadat inside the villa, Dayan talking unsmilingly with his Egyptian counterpart in a corner of the garden, and Weizman sitting, nearly enthroned, in the middle of the lawn, joking with Abd-al-Ghani el-Gamassy and Vice-President Hosny Mubarak, radiant and at home, reveling in it. When he saw an Israeli friend among the journalists on the other side of the garden, he got up, jumping on one foot (the other one was still in a plaster cast), pulled him over, and introduced him to his Egyptian friends.

When it was decided in Ismailia to set up two joint committees—a political one of the two foreign ministers and a military one of the two defense ministers—the Egyptians insisted that the military committee convene in Cairo, the political one in Jerusalem. Thus Weizman was given the chance to come to Egypt and talk with Sadat two more times, while poor Dayan was left at home. An Israeli military delegation was installed in Egypt, enabling Weizman to pick up his telephone receiver in Tel Aviv and talk directly with Cairo, to his own obvious enjoyment. He was once more called to Egypt, and then received the invitation to Salzburg.

Obviously, the Egyptians are cultivating Weizman, deliberately enhancing his prestige. But there is more to it. Both Sadat and Gamassy enjoy talking with the tall Israeli general, as does everyone who comes into contact with him. A typical bit of conversation:

WEIZMAN: "Hussein has made three great mistakes. First, in joining the Six-Day War, in which he lost the West Bank. Second, in not joining you in the Yom Kippur War. Third, in not joining you in your peace initiative."

SADAT: "What would you have done in his place?"

WEIZMAN: "If I had heard that you were coming to Jerusalem to pray in my al-Aksa Mosq, I would have arrived there an hour before you to receive you and be your host!"

SADAT (laughing): "Really, Ezra, you have the most crazy ideas!"

For Begin, Sadat's manifest preference for Weizman is a continuing cause of anger, perhaps of unconscious jealousy. His relations with his minister of defense have steadily worsened. When Weizman brought back from Salzburg some new secret ideas of Sadat, Begin had them leaked to the press, effectively killing them. The cabinet treated the meeting with disdain, postponing discussion for a week. Everything was done to gag Weizman to do something rash, as is his nature. But Weizman is restraining himself, probably talking to
himself: “Weizman, keep your cool.” Yet, when he saw in the prime minister’s office an anniversary poster bearing the word “Shalom,” he could not restrain himself from tearing it down. Begin’s reaction: “I told him—‘Why do you destroy public property in my office? In your own office you can do as you like.’”

What would Weizman do if he were prime minister? What will he do, if he does get the job—e.g., if Begin’s health fails, or if some crisis changes the political setup?

It would be relatively easy for him to give back all of Sinai, also all of the Golan Heights. But for many years he has been committed to the incorporation of the West Bank into Israel. There can be no doubt that for him, today, achieving peace with Egypt is the paramount objective. As a military man, he has been trained to concentrate on the main effort and not let anything distract from it. The West Bank, which for him has been the aim of the main effort until now, has been pushed by the peace initiative into a secondary role. If necessary, he will give way there too. Not gladly, not easily, but as a necessary sacrifice in order to achieve the principal objective.

Seven years ago Weizman surprised many by stating openly that Israel should talk with the PLO, an idea tantamount to heresy for most Israelis and all members of his own party. He did not want to give them the West Bank, but perhaps help them to overturn King Hussein and establish a Palestinian state east of the Jordan. Now he talks about the possibility of some Israeli-Palestinian federation. What he has in mind is a much larger picture—some sort of Middle Eastern regional organization in which a fully accepted Israel could play an important role, as a main ally of Egypt.

The superhawk of yesteryear has flown a long way.

Will Ezer Weizman get the chance to put his new ideas to a test? As a minister he is immensely popular. Public opinion polls consistently show that, while Dayan’s popularity rating as foreign minister is around 60 per cent, and Begin’s as prime minister below 70 per cent, Weizman’s popularity rating as defense minister is about 80 per cent.

If Begin were incapacitated tomorrow, there would probably be no possibility of blocking Weizman. But if the government coalition breaks apart under pressure, the Labor party could come back to power and Shimon Peres would have a chance to assume the leading role. Weizman himself knows that his future is uncertain. Sometimes he is resigned to the possibility that the highest prize may elude him. “It always happens to me,” he sighed recently. “I sow, others reap. I prepared the Air Force for the big strike, and Motti [Hod] commanded it on the great day. I prepared the creation of the Likud bloc, and Arik [Sharon] did it. Now I am working for peace; perhaps somebody else will be there when it happens.”

On the other hand, he may get his chance. If this happens, it will be more than a personal test. Once before, after the resignation of Golda Meir, the sabra generation got its chance through Yitzhak Rabin. It failed, and power was given back to an Eastern European, Menachem Begin, the immigrant from Poland. Through Ezer Weizman the Sabra Superstar, the generation born in Israel may be given a second opportunity to prove its mettle.