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Ezer Weizman, Moshe Sharett remembered at Beit Hanassi ceremony on 'New Year for Kings'

• By GREER FAY CASHMAN

The first day of the Hebrew calendar month of Nisan is traditionally known as "New Year for Kings." In modern Israel, the date has been set aside as one on which to honor the memories of deceased presidents and prime ministers.

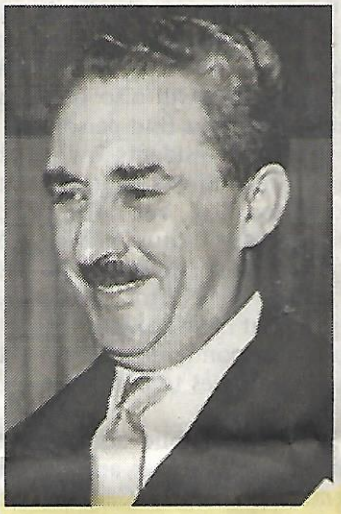
The memorial ceremony is held at Beit Hanassi in the presence of the current president and prime minister, and always focuses on one president and one prime minister, although the names of all the country's deceased leader are read.

Each year, the President's Prize and the Prime Minister's Prize are awarded to individuals or institutions who have memorialized the chosen figures.

This year, the president and prime minister honored were Ezer Weizman and Moshe Sharett, respectively.

The President's Prize went to the Israel Air Force, which Weizman commanded before he shed his uniform and entered politics.

EZER WEIZMAN



MOSHE SHARETT

The Prime Minister's Prize was shared by Dr. Shimon Havivi, who wrote a book on Sharett's policy towards the Druse, and the Moshe Sharett Elementary School in Holon, which teaches pupils about Sharett.

President Shimon Peres and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert each referred to Weizman's charisma, charm, straightforwardness, spontaneity and ability to think clearly.

"He was always able to conquer people's hearts, regardless of their ethnic or national affiliations," said Peres, adding that Weizman's decisions, whether in war or in peace, were always carefully thought out and rational.

Olmert said much the same thing, adding that Weizman was a hawk among hawks who never missed an opportunity to pave the path to peace.

Both regarded him as the ultimate sabra.

Peres admitted that he could not be objective about Sharett, whose views differed from those of David Ben-Gurion, Peres's mentor. Even in retrospect, he said, he could not agree with Sharett, but he nonetheless admired him for having had the courage to stand up to Ben-Gurion.

In fairness to Sharett, Peres said that he always gave those who disagreed with him the opportunity to express their views and the option of choice. The president also said that Sharett, who was Israel's first foreign minister, had laid the foundations for Israel's diplomacy.

Olmert noted that Sharett should be remembered for the imprint that he had left on the state. Both Peres and Olmert singled out Sharett's erudition, his gift for language – Hebrew, in particular.