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Netanyahu and Ayn Rand

Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked, without doubt the biggest reformer in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government, told the New York Times in 2015 that her approach to changing the face of society was partly shaped by the writer Ayn Rand: "The fact that sometimes you think differently than others," she told the newspaper, "but you still need to insist on your views, although you are being accused."

Shaked isn't the only person influenced by Rand. The Russian-American writer's extreme libertarian philosophy is currently a much greater influence on the world than discredited Marxist theory. Rand's books are considered mandatory reading by President Donald Trump and many members of his cabinet, and have also made a deep impression on Netanyahu.

In Netanyahu's youth in Philadelphia, Rand's books were at the height of their popularity. He once told the Washington Post his brother Yoni had taught him to read Plato, Nietzsche – and Rand. In a speech Netanyahu gave in July, he said: "I read, when I was 16 years old, I read Ayn Rand, so I decided everything has to be libertarian. By the time I was 21, I had gotten rid of it, grew out of it."

Maybe he did grow out of it, and perhaps it's just a coincidence that he studied architecture like Howard Roark, the protagonist in Rand's 1943 novel "The Fountainhead." And maybe it's just a coincidence he waged an obsessive war against Yedioth Ahronoth publisher Arnon Mozes, as Roark did against publisher Gail Wynand, who had shaped public opinion against Roark.

But an unpublished book Netanyahu wrote after serving as finance minister reveals that he sees himself as a typical Rand-esque protagonist such as Roark.

In "Hanamer Hayisraeli" ("The Israeli Tiger"), Netanyahu described the "revolution" he had brought about in the Israeli economy. The book, in his view, was designed to be a "practical guide to political economy" – a course of sorts for economic reformers. Ultimately, he decided not to publish the

book, apparently convinced it might harm his image.

Maybe that was because Rand – the champion of egotistical individualism – would have happily subscribed to most of the book's contents. Its unstated theme (similar to Trump's explicit theme) is: Everyone is against me, and they're wrong. It's classic Rand. Netanyahu boasts about how right he was in his predictions of Islamic terrorism, adding that very few paid heed. He also boasts about how right he was in bringing about nothing less than an economic revolution in Israel, through a policy that everyone actually opposed – the media, the social justice lobbies, organized workers' committees, the monopolies, academia, other politicians and the general public.

Like Roark, he finds himself almost alone in front of the parasitic masses, which oppress the "entrepreneurs, innovators and the pioneers" whose right it is to make "a fortune from what has improved the lives of others." He had defeated those whom he called "impersonators of the weak" and the "imaginary needy," thus providing freedom to people like himself. "Market policy will light a spark of genius that we are born with and the entrepreneurial spirit that is inside of us," he wrote, in the spirit of Rand.

He even enlisted the founder of modern Zionism, Theodor Herzl, to Rand's school of thought. He makes reference to "Altneuland" – Herzl's novel in which he describes his vision for Jewish society, and in which he wrote: "In our new society ... we have not eliminated the distinction between mine and yours. We are not so crazy. We haven't thrown the incentive for work, for effort, for invention and for development into the sea. Clear talent is worthy of fitting compensation, and special effort is entitled to a high wage."

The tiger in "The Israeli Tiger" is Netanyahu, who incessantly praises himself for "courageous policy" and "daring steps." Today, too, he is convinced he is right and everyone else is wrong. And in this context, it's worth remembering that Roark blows up the building he himself built.