

# Bibi's Son or: Three Men in a Car

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January 13, 2018

**N**O, I DON'T want to write about the affair of Ya'ir Netanyahu. I refuse adamantly. No force in the world will compel me to do so. Yet here I am, writing about Ya'ir, damn it. Can't resist.

And perhaps it is really more than a matter of gossip. Perhaps it is something that we cannot ignore.

IT IS all about a conversation between three young men in a car, some two years ago.

One of the young men was Ya'ir, the eldest of the two sons of the Prime Minister.

Ya'ir is named after the leader of the "Stern Gang", whose real name was Abraham Stern. The original Ya'ir split from the Irgun underground in 1940, when Britain stood alone against Nazi Germany. While the Irgun stopped its actions against the British government for the time being, Stern demanded the very opposite: exploit the moment in order to get the British out of Palestine. He was shot by the British police.

The modern Ya'ir and his two friends were on a drunken tour of Tel Aviv strip-tease joints, an appellation which often seems to be a polite way of describing a brothel.

Somebody took the trouble to record the conversation of the young men—the sons of the Prime Minister and two of the richest "tycoons" in the country.

This recording has now surfaced. Since the publication, hardly anyone in Israel is talking about anything else.

According to the recording, Ya'ir demanded from his friend, Nir Maimon, 400 shekels (about 100 dollars), in order to visit a prostitute. When the friend refused, Ya'ir exclaimed: "My father gave your father a concession worth a billion dollars, and you refuse to give me 400 shekels?"

The concession in question concerns the rich gas fields out in the sea near Israel's shores.

In an especially disgusting display of his utter contempt for the female sex, Ya'ir also offered to provide all his friends with the sexual services of his ex-girlfriend.

THIS RECORDING raises a whole pile of questions, each more unpleasant than the next.

First of all: who made it? Apart from Ya'ir and his two pals, there were only two persons present; the driver of the car and a bodyguard.

This raises some more questions. First, why is the 26-year old man provided with bodyguards at all, and for a tour of strip-tease joints in particular?

Ya'ir has no official function. No son or daughter of any former prime minister has ever been provided with bodyguards. No known danger threatens this particular son. So why must I pay for one?

Second, what about the driver? Ya'ir was riding in a government car, driven by a government driver. Why? What right has he to a government car and to a government driver, in general—and in particular for such an escapade?

The episode has drawn the attention of the public to this son of privilege.

Who is Ya'ir Netanyahu? What does he do for a living? The simple answer: Nothing.

He has no profession. He has no job. He lives in the state-owned official residence in Jerusalem and eats at the state's expense.

What about his record? The only service he ever performed was as a soldier at the office of the army spokesman—not much risk of meeting flying bullets there. You need a lot of pull to land such a cozy job in the army.

Every reader can ask himself or herself: where was he or she when they were 26 years old?

Speaking for myself, at that age I had behind me several years of service in the Irgun underground, a year of continual fighting in a renowned army commando unit, a battle wound, and the beginning of my career as the editor-in-chief of a belligerent news magazine. I have earned my living since the age of 15. That is not something special to be proud of—many young people of my generation have the same past (except the journalistic part, of course).

STILL, THIS part of the story can be explained by the character of this particular young man. Can a parent be held responsible for the character of his offspring?

Like many politicians, Netanyahu had no time for his children. It's the mother who bears most of the responsibility.

Sarah Netanyahu, known as "Sarah'le", is generally disliked. A former airplane stewardess, who "caught" Binyamin at an airport duty-free shop and became his third wife, is a haughty and quarrelsome person, who is in perpetual conflict with her government-paid household

personnel. Some of these quarrels reach the courts.

So this is all a family affair, except that it raises some profound political questions.

What is the social setting of the Prime Minister, himself the son of a poor university professor and a government employee for almost all his life?

His offspring consorts with the sons of the country's richest peoples, who are enriching themselves with the active help of the Prime Minister—Netanyahu influences the government funding of big projects. At the moment, the police are conducting at least four separate investigations into Netanyahu's personal economic affairs.

Practically all of Netanyahu's personal associates and friends are under police investigation. His closest friend, lawyer and relative is under investigation concerning the acquisition of immensely expensive German-made submarines. The navy claims that it does not need all of them.

In his private life, Netanyahu is being investigated for receiving for a long time cases of the most expensive Cuban cigars from super-rich “friends”, for whom he provided some services. Sarah'le is investigated for receiving, on demand, a regular supply of very expensive pink champagne from another billionaire, whom she also asked to buy her jewelry.

THIS ENTIRE atmosphere of public and private corruption at the top of the state is very much removed from our past. It is something new, reflecting the Netanyahu era.

One could not even imagine anything like this in the times of David Ben-Gurion. His son, Amos, was implicated in some affairs which my magazine exposed, but nothing even remotely resembling this.

Menachem Begin lived for many years as an MK in the same two-room apartment where he had hidden as the most wanted terrorist in British Palestine. Golda Meir, Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres all lived in modest circumstances.

Public humor calls Netanyahu “king” and even “emperor” and speaks of the “royal family”. Why?

One reason is certainly the time factor. Netanyahu is now in his fourth term of office. That is much too much.

Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely, as Lord Acton remarked. One can replace “absolute” with “long-term”.

A person in power is surrounded by temptations, flatterers, corruptors, and as time goes by, his resistance wanes. That, alas, is human.

After the endless presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a relatively honest and effective chief executive, the American people did something extremely wise: it limited a president to two terms. I also have come to the conclusion that eight years is exactly right.<sup>1</sup>

I DON'T hate Binyamin Netanyahu, as many Israelis do. He does not really interest me as a person. But I believe that he is a danger to the future of Israel. His obsession with clinging to power makes him sell out our national interests to interest groups, not just to billionaires but also to the corrupt religious establishment and many others.

Such a man is unable to make peace, even if he wanted to. Making peace demands strength of character, like taking the risk of being overthrown. Such audacity does not even enter Netanyahu's mind.

Tell me who your son is, and I'll tell you who you are.

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<sup>1</sup>That applies to myself, too. I was a Member of Parliament for ten years. In retrospect I have drawn the conclusion that eight years should have been enough. During my last two years I was less enthusiastic, less combative.