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Israel's War Against Smoking

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ABSTRACT

Illness caused by smoking has become a worldwide problem, and governments, assisted by the World Health Organization, have conducted campaigns to lessen the health risks to their country's population. This research illustrates the efforts undertaken by the State of Israel since its founding to make its citizens aware of the problem posed to their health from smoking. The Israeli print media and the health insurance sick funds publicized the latest research on the issue, while Israeli governments and non-governmental bodies, especially the Israel Cancer Association, employed legislation, varieties of educational programs, and advertising campaigns to increase public awareness of the danger to their health from smoking. These efforts had an impact and smoking by Israelis declined. However, recent surveys show that 20 percent of the population continues to smoke.

Keywords: Smoking, Tobacco, Cancer, Heart disease, Israel

I. INTRODUCTION

The state of Israel came into being in 1948 and almost from its founding, Israeli governments and public bodies, especially the Israel Cancer Society, have waged a relentless campaign against smoking. This "war" has consisted of legislation restricting cigarette advertising and smoking in public places, educational programs in the schools, utilizing newspapers, radio, and television to increase public awareness of the health risks posed by smoking, and using the media to publicize the different campaigns against smoking.

Beginning in the 1950s, Israeli newspapers and the country's sick funds began publishing the results of scientific studies conducted in the United States, the United Kingdom, and other European countries that pointed to cigarette smoking as a cause of lung cancer.¹ From then on, the press kept the public informed about foreign and local research studies that linked smoking to lung and other cancers. Most of the articles summarized or reprinted American, European and Israeli research studies and featured interviews with leading foreign and Israeli cancer specialists that warned the public about the health dangers of smoking. With the large immigration of Jews from the former Soviet Union in the 1970s, Israel's Russian language press translated and published smoking and health articles that originally appeared in the Hebrew press.²

Israeli health insurance sick funds were especially vigilant to keep their members abreast of research that linked cigarette smoking to cancer. In an article entitled "Smoking Tobacco is a Cause of Lung-Bronchi Cancer, *Aytanim*, the Histadrut labor federation's General Sick Fund magazine printed the first account of Dr. Ernst L. Wynder's cancer patient study, published in the May 1950 Journal of the American Medical Association, in which he found a link between heavy smoking and lung cancer.³ The magazine also kept its sick fund members apprised of major British research studies that linked cigarette smoking to lung cancer.⁴

Other print sources also informed the public about the link between cigarette smoking and cancer. Those with the widest readership included the army magazine, *B'mahaneh* (In the Camp) that went free to soldiers in the Israeli Defense Forces, the popular women's magazine *La'isha*, and the *Ma'ariv* newspaper's youth edition, *Ma'ariv L'noar* (*Ma'ariv* for Young People). All of them informed their readers about the dangers to their health from smoking, especially the risk of getting lung cancer.⁵ Through the 1990s, in long articles and in its question and answer columns, *Ma'ariv L'noar* continued informing its young readers about the dangers to their health from smoking.⁶

1. *Ha'aretz*, 21 July, 1950; *Davar*, 26 September 195, 19 February 1954; *Ha'aretz*, 19 February 1954; *Ma'ariv*, 19 May 1954; *Davar*, 3 September 1954.

2. *Nashastrana*, 4 March 1971, 1 July 1971; 23 April 1972; 15 March 1974; 1 November 1974; 19 December 1975; *Vesty*, 30 June 1994, no. 258.

3. *Aytanim*, November 1950: 256.

4. *Ibid.*, 1952 [no month given]: 272; September 1954: 290.

5. *B'mahaneh*, 10 October 1962: 10-12; 8 January 1966: 22-23; 25 January 1966: 20; 8 November 1966: 23; *La'isha*, 3 April 1962: 12; 17 April 1962: 4-5; 24 October 1978: 76-77, 99; 25 December 1978: 71; 5 February 1979: 71; 5 March 1979: 71; *Ma'ariv L'noar*, 3 November 1959: 16; 22 August 1961: 12-13; 10 November 1964: 16; 24 October 1967: 20; 2 September 1969: 21; 9 September 1969: 16; 3 November 1970: 11; 11 January 1971: 1; 2 August 1971: 9.

6. *Ma'ariv L'noar.*, 7 March 1993: 16-17; 25 March 1994: 12-14; 30 May 1996: 12-15; 18 June 1998: 14-17.

In 1960, popular Hebrew language books on health issues began warning people about the link between smoking and lung cancer. The author of one such book, a Dr. Yaakov Arnon, wrote that that “During the last few years, the cases of lung cancer that were examined in different hospitals in the United States revealed a clear connection between smoking cigarettes and lung cancer.”⁷

By then, the Israeli press started featuring pronouncements by Israeli physicians concerning the dangers inherent in smoking. A typical example is a November 1961 *Ha'aretz* article that quoted Professor Yitzhak Berenblum, head of the experimental biology department at the Weizmann Institute of Science, who declared that “There is a clear connection between cigarette smoking and lung cancer.”⁸

A key turning point in Israel's campaign against smoking occurred in 1964 with the publication of United States Surgeon General Luther Terry's landmark report that said, in essence, that smoking will kill you if you smoke long enough. President John F. Kennedy had appointed this commission in 1962 to examine the effects of smoking on one's health. The Surgeon General's report concluded that cigarette smoking was “causally related to lung cancer” in men and a probable cause of lung cancer in women. The report also stated that many kinds of damage to bodily functions, organs and cells occurred more frequently in smokers than in those who did not smoke. For the first time, the United States government officially recognized that cigarette smoking was a cause of cancer and posed a serious health hazard.⁹

The report and its conclusions made headlines in Israel. “Smoking Cigarettes – A Cause of Lung Cancer and Increases the Rate of Mortality from Other Diseases,” trumpeted a headline in the Labor Party's newspaper, *Davar*. The article summarized the report and its conclusions, stressing that cigarette smoking was the main factor in the formation of lung cancer and bronchitis.¹⁰ *Davar* devoted additional articles to discussing the report and reactions to it by Israeli physicians. One of its articles began: “Dear readers! Please throw away your cigarette. Stop smoking! Smoking is dangerous; the cigarette is death!”¹¹ The nation's two largest daily newspapers *Ma'ariv* and *Yedioth Ahronoth* also featured articles that discussed the report and its conclusions.¹²

In the wake of the Surgeon General's report, the Histadrut's sick fund magazine, *Aytanim*, published a series of articles reviewing that report and World Health Organization reports that linked cigarette smoking to lung cancer.¹³ Under the heading, “The Cigarette is the Murderer,” the series formed part of the sick fund's ongoing efforts to make its members aware of the link between smoking and cancer, particularly lung cancer.¹⁴ The earliest articles linking smoking and cancer appeared in 1950, and most of the articles published over the next five decades dealt with the same subject.¹⁵ In the April 1985 issue, the magazine's editor discussed the various subjects appearing in the magazine to that date. “At the head of the list of subjects,” he said, “stands smoking.”¹⁶

7. *Cancer: Its Prevention and Cure According to New Science* [Heb.] (Tel Aviv 1960): 62.

8. *Ha'aretz*, 3 November 1961.

9. U.S. Surgeon General, *Smoking and Health: Report of the Advisory Committee to the Surgeon General* (U.S. Public Health Service, 1964).

10. *Davar*, 12 January 1964.

11. *Ibid.*, 17 January 1964.

12. *Ma'ariv*, 12 January 1964; 12 January 1964; 16 January 1964; *Yediot Ahronot* 13 January 1964.

13. *Aytanim*, February 1964: 45-46; March 1964: 82; October 1964: 376.

14. *Ibid.*, February 1964: 45.

15. *Ibid.*, October 1950: 217; April 19, 1985: 99; July 1997: 17, 18.

16. *Ibid.*, April 1985: 99.

By the 1990s Israel's other sick funds, most especially the Maccabi sick fund in its magazine *Maccabeeton*, published lengthy articles in their publications to educate their members on the dangers to their health from smoking.¹⁷

The army magazine *B'mahaneh* likewise devoted space in a number of issues to discussing the report.¹⁸ The magazine followed this up with a series of articles warning soldiers about the link between smoking and lung cancer.¹⁹ The U.S. Surgeon General's report also moved the women's magazine *La'isha* to introduce a column titled "News from the World of Medicine." Among other items, this column printed research studies that showed a link between smoking and diseases of the lungs and cancers.²⁰

After the U.S. Surgeon General's report appeared, popular Hebrew language encyclopedias and family health encyclopedias began including detailed articles and pictorial material that discussed and illustrated the connection between smoking and lung cancer. The *Family Medical Encyclopedia* emphasized that commissions established in many countries concluded that "smoking is in all cases the reason for death from lung cancer." And the *Popular Medical Encyclopedia* asserted that "the rise in morbidity from lung cancer is caused by smoking a great deal."²¹

The publication of the Surgeon General's report and the attendant publicity put pressure on the Israeli government to act. Less than a week after news of the report appeared in the press, the Ministry of Health discussed whether the report's conclusions warranted their adopting measures in this area. In the meantime, the Ministry of Education and Culture in conjunction with the Israel Cancer Association (ICA) created programs to counter smoking among students in the schools.²²

The government together with the ICA also broadcast public service announcements on the radio and screened films on television about the dangers of smoking. In November and December 1980, Israel television broadcast a three-program series on the health dangers of smoking, including lung cancer, and ways to stop smoking. At the time, this was the country's only television channel. The program was broadcast on Sundays at 8 PM, over a six-week period. Surveys showed that most of Israel's viewing public saw at least one of the programs, while over 40 percent viewed two or three of the programs.²³

The danger of contracting cancer from smoking even received recognition in a popular movie of the 1970s. In 1975, an Israeli movie, *Snooker Celebration*, portrayed the Israel of the 1960s. In the film, the male lead spends all his time playing snooker (billiards). Masquerading as his twin brother, he invites a rabbi's beautiful daughter to the seashore. When there, he pulls out a pack of cigarettes and offers her one.

She: "What? You smoke?"

He: "Me? No! I asked if you smoke."

17. *Maccabeeton*, April 1991: 18; April 1993: 20; Winter 1994: 16; Autumn 1997:13; Summer, 1998: 11-13; Autumn 1998:9; Spring 1999: 24.

18. *B'mahaneh*, 25 January 1966: 20; 8 November 1966: 23.

19. *B'mahaneh*, July 1974: 10-11.

20. *La'isha*, June 24, 1974: 89; December 16, 1974: 56; August 25, 1975: 44; December 21, 1981:16-17.

21. *Family Medical Encyclopedia* (Heb.): 1358; *Popular Medical Encyclopedia* (Heb.): 670.

22. *Davar*, 16 January 1964.

23. The survey encompassed 1,095 adult Israelis above the age of twenty. The percentages of those who viewed the program are taken from this survey.

She: “What! Are you crazy?”

He: “Of course, it’s forbidden. It’s poison. One can get cancer from it.” He then throws the cigarette away.²⁴

In addition to the link between smoking and lung cancer, starting in the 1950s Israel’s newspapers and the sick funds also provided the public with information that linked smoking to other cancers, notably cancers of the mouth and throat.²⁵ As with the articles on smoking and lung cancer, the early articles reported the results of British and American research studies and often quoted American and British researchers on the subject. One example of this was an article in *Ma’ariv* quoting Professor Howard Temin, a Nobel Prize recipient for medicine, who claimed that that “80 percent of cancers are due to smoking”.²⁶

Over time, the newspapers also imparted information about Israeli research and gave wider coverage to the warnings and comments of Israeli cancer specialists. The Israel-Russian press as well published articles discussing foreign and Israeli research and quoted Israeli physicians linking smoking to cancer. And the youth magazine *Ma’ariv L’noar* warned its readers that smoking causes cancer of the tongue as well as the lungs.²⁷

Commencing in the 1950s, the press also provided the Israeli public with information about the link between smoking and cardiovascular diseases.²⁸ All the newspapers published articles that described medical research showing the impact smoking on the heart. This continued into the 21st century. The titles of many of the articles left little doubt as to their content: “A Connection Between Smoking and Heart Disease,” read one article in *Yedioth Ahronoth*.²⁹ “Smoking Causes Heart Attacks,” read an article in *Ma’ariv*.³⁰ Another, in *Ha’aretz*, announced, “Smoking Greatly Increases the Risk of Dying from a Heart Attack.”³¹ A number of the articles quoted prominent foreign heart specialists, including Dr. Christian Barnard, as well as local heart specialists, all of whom maintained that smoking was a leading factor in causing heart disease. And one way of preventing heart attacks was not to smoke.³²

By the 1980s, heart disease had become the number one killer in Israel.³³ *Ma’ariv* and *Yedioth Ahronoth*, broadcast this fact to its readers and published the latest American, British and Israeli research studies linking smoking to heart disease.³⁴ Many of the articles specifically warned the reader that smokers were

24. “Snooker Celebration” [“Hagigah B’snooker”] (1975).

25. *Davar*, 15 June 1955; *Ha’aretz*, 28 September 1951; 9 April 1952; 10 December 1953; *Ma’ariv*, weekend supplement, 19 March 1954; 1 June 1956; *Davar*, 26 December 1952; 4 December 1953.

26. *Ma’ariv*, 12 December 1975.

27. *Davar*, 20 November 1953; 8 April 1954; 21 June 1957; 11 October 1966; *Ha’aretz*, 10 December 1953; *Yedioth Ahronot*, 27 October 1961; *Nashastrana*, 4 March 1971; 15 March 1974, no. 847; 19 December 1975, no. 1382; *Vesty*, 30 June 1994 no. 258; *Ma’ariv L’noar*, 10 December 1964.

28. *Ha’aretz*, 2 June 1950; 26 April 1951; 7 October 1955; *Ma’ariv*, 21 November 1952, supplement; *Davar*, 9 July 1953.

29. *Yedioth Ahronot*, 26 June 1962.

30. *Ma’ariv*, 18 August 1976.

31. *Ha’aretz*, 30 April 1974.

32. For example, see *Ha’aretz*, 29 March 1971; 8 March 1971; 7 April 1972; 14 June 1974; 29 January 1975; 5 October 1975; 17 September 1976; 5 December 1977; 19 April 1979; *Yedioth Ahronot*, 12 May 1970; 31 October 1971; 4 July 1975; 4 March 1979; *Ma’ariv*, December 1971; 19 August 1973; 28 November 1975; 21 January 1977; 28 September 1978; 10 October 1979.

33. *Ma’ariv*, 19 December 1982.

34. See, *Ma’ariv*, 18 April 1980; 30 January 1981; 5 April 1981; 22 December 1982;

20 July 1984; 10 July 1985; 10 June 1987; *Yedioth Ahronot*, 10 June 1981; 1 October 1982; 27 February 1983; 12 October 1984; 29 April 1986; 7 June 1987; 24 January 1989; 27 July 1992.

two to three times more likely to die of a heart attack than non-smokers.³⁵ The sick fund magazines also devoted numerous articles describing the link between smoking and heart disease and stressed that those who smoked had a far greater chance of having a heart attack than did non-smokers.³⁶ The army magazine *B'mahaneh* likewise publicized the fact that smoking cigarettes was a factor in heart disease.³⁷

In addition, the nation's newspapers and other print media publicized research showing that smoking increased the risk of an early death. For example, *Yedioth Ahronoth* publicized the 1968 report of the United States Department of Health which stated "cigarettes shorten the life span of every smoker by eight years." The newspaper also headlined a German researcher's claim that "each cigarette shortens one's life by 12 minutes."³⁸ The Histadrut sick fund and the Maccabee sick fund published articles and statistics in their magazines that linked smoking to a shortened life span, as did the army magazine *B'mahaneh* and the youth newspaper *Ma'ariv L'noar*.³⁹

II. Public Health Organizations' Efforts to Prevent Smoking

Public health organizations in Israel, such as the ICA and the Israel Association to Prevent Smoking, undertook activities throughout the years to educate and inform the public about the dangers of smoking. A particular focus of their efforts has been educational campaigns, typically undertaken with support from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, to reduce smoking among youth. The campaigns included the dissemination of school instructional material and programs, and the development of school curricula.

The Israel Cancer Association was established in 1952, and from its beginnings sponsored courses, lectures, conferences; printed pamphlets, brochures and other publications, such as posters and stickers; and subsidized public service announcements on the radio, television and films warning the public about the danger of cancers from smoking.⁴⁰

By the 1960s, the organization had distributed hundreds of thousands of pieces of printed material, sponsored programs such as nation-wide poster contests, and special postage stamps aimed at raising the public's awareness of the link between smoking and cancer, especially lung cancer.⁴¹

Starting in 1960, the ICA sponsored an annual door-to-door fundraising campaign called "Knock on the Door," to distribute information and materials, to increase awareness, and to raise money, for the war against cancer. The campaign is a national fundraising event, held entirely on a volunteer basis, and is one

35. *Yediot Ahronot*, 7 March 1983; 29 July 1987; 22 January 1991; 27 April 1992; 29 May 1997.

36. *Maccabeeton*, July 1987: 5. See also *Aytanim*, February 1981: 54-56, May 1983: 150-151. .

37. *B'mahaneh*, 22 December 1982: 22; 7 November 1984: 20-21, 54; 14 August 1985: 4; 15 January 1986: 15; 5 August 1987: 28; 16 May 1990: 51.

38. *Yediot Ahronot*, 18 July 1968; 16 December 1969.

39. *Maccabeeton*, 7 July 1990: 12; *Aytanim*, 1953: 343-346; March 1963: 100; January 1973: 3; July 1978: 197; August 1984: 238-244; *Ma'ariv L'noar*, 3 November 1970; *B'mahaneh*, December 8, 1982: 57; 14 August 1985: 4; 13 January 1993: 28-29; 3 April 1996: 20-21.

40. *Ha'aretz*, 15 June 1961. See the annual reports of the Israel Cancer Association for a resume of the organization's activities.

41. *Ha'aretz*, 21 October 1964; *Yediot Ahronot*, 25 October 1964; *Ma'ariv*, 2 June 1964. The annual reports of the Israel Cancer Associations list the organization's yearly activities.

of the organization's primary means of raising funds. Tens of thousands of volunteers partake in the campaign, among them school children, youth groups, volunteer organizations, private citizens and businesses. The campaign spans a two-week period in more than 1,300 locals throughout Israel. The climax of the fundraiser is the specific day of the "Knock on the Door" campaign itself when approximately 30,000 school children and members of youth groups voluntarily visit over one million homes scattered throughout Israel to pass out material and collect funds.

The 1964 U.S. Surgeon General's report linking smoking to lung cancer had an impact on the Cancer Association's activities.⁴² A few weeks after the report became public, the organization created a committee of Israeli physicians and cancer specialists to lobby for action against smoking, especially among the young, including the banning of cigarette advertisements.⁴³ And that year's Door Knock campaign included material linking smoking and cancer.⁴⁴ The ICA enlisted Prime Minister David Ben Gurion, a non-smoker, to head the campaign, hoping that this would publicize even more the health risks associated with smoking. The country's president and ICA patron, Mr. Zalman Shazar, voiced a similar wish.⁴⁵

In the 1970s, the Knock on the Door campaign increasingly focused on the "War Against Smoking."⁴⁶ For instance, the theme of the 1970 campaign was, "Don't Open Your Mouth to Cancer," illustrated by a cigarette super-imposed on the symbol for cancer.⁴⁷ For the thousands of youth delivering the materials and the millions of Israelis receiving them the message was clear: smoking causes disease.

The Israel Association to Prevent Smoking was established in 1970 by an interested group of physicians, attorneys, sociologists and academicians, some of whom had quit smoking themselves, to prevent smoking of any kind, to warn the public about the dangers to their health from smoking, to dissuade people from starting to smoke, and to help smokers break their habit. By 1972, the group received backing from the Ministry of Health. On their own initiative and with the support of the Ministry, the group instituted lectures, parlor groups, conferences; set up advisory offices and telephone hotlines, and sponsored public service announcements in the media, and educational programs and films.⁴⁸ The ICA and the Israel Association to Prevent Smoking both utilized the press to publicize their activities and to inform the public about the dangers to their health from smoking.

The ICA focused a great deal of effort on programs of information and persuasion directed at the youth in order to deter them from smoking. This included meetings with school educators and young people throughout the country in programs aimed at convincing youngsters not to smoke.⁴⁹ At the same time, the Cancer Association and the Israeli government cooperated in a variety of projects to educate the public and young people of the dangers to their health from smoking.⁵⁰ This cooperation became an ongoing enterprise.

42. The ICA's report for 1964 notes the statistical connection between smoking and lung cancer.

43. *Ma'ariv*, 27 January 1964, p. 15.

44. *Ma'ariv*, 5 November 1964, p. 4.

45. *Yediot Ahronot*, 21 October 1964, p. 15.

46. *Ha'aretz*, 10 November 1970; 31 October 31, 1978; 12 November 1979; *Ma'ariv*, 9 November 1971; 13 November 1979; *Ma'ariv L'noar*, 23 October 1972: 23.

47. ICA Annual Report (1970): *Ma'ariv*, 10 November 1970; *Yediot Ahronot*, 28 September 1970.

48. *Ha'aretz*, weekend supplement, 10 November 1972; 7 March 1972; 8 April 1974; *Ma'ariv*, 3 March 1972; 10 April 1972; 23 September 1973; 17 March 1974; 13 March 1975; *Yediot Ahronot*, 5 March 1972; 27 May 1973; 11 March 1974; 11 March 1975.

49. *Yediot Ahronot*, 24 October 1966.

50. *Ha'aretz*, 5 November 1969.

Additional efforts by the ICA included instituting a nation-wide “No Smoking Day,” increasing the number of public service announcements on radio and television; producing films for television; establishing “withdrawal from smoking” parlor groups that met in hotels; placing anti-smoking signs in buses; developing anti-smoking programs for the army; sponsoring children’s drawing contests with no-smoking themes; and creating new inter-disciplinary educational programs for use in high schools.⁵¹

Other activities included mounting large anti-smoking signs on billboards throughout the country; recruiting scouts and other youth groups to distribute anti-smoking material to passengers on buses; and using high school students to broadcast messages on the danger of smoking over loudspeakers placed in the main square of Tel Aviv, while others passed out printed material to passerby.⁵² In addition, the Cancer Association recruited a large number of celebrities – singers, actors and sports stars – to aid in their non-smoking efforts.⁵³

Beginning in the 1980s, Israeli television presented a series of 30-second antismoking commercials sponsored by the Israel Cancer Association. Some of the commercials depicted smoking as a disgusting habit; others stressed the link between smoking and various diseases. One 1984 commercial shows a pack of cigarettes. Suddenly the cigarettes turn into ugly worms that begin writhing, crawling and falling out of the pack. Another commercial takes place in a nightclub. A young man sits at the bar smoking. A beautiful girl is dancing. They notice one another and smile. The boy puffs on his cigarette and the smoke curls around his lips. The girl sees this and her smile turns to disgust. Commercials such as these have continued.⁵⁴

During that same decade, the ICA broadened its activities. It introduced a nation-wide “No Smoking Day,” increased the number of public service announcements on radio and television; produced additional films for television; established “withdrawal from smoking” parlor groups that met in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and Haifa hotels; placed anti-smoking signs in buses; developed anti-smoking programs for the army; sponsored children’s drawing contests with no-smoking themes, such as “A World Without Smoking”; and created new inter-disciplinary educational program for use in high schools.⁵⁵

The 1990s witnessed a continuation of the ICA’s anti-smoking activities, and an especially a massive and forceful campaign in all the media. This encompassed articles and large anti-smoking advertisements in newspapers, and public service programs on television. The ICA also increased its work with the army, extended its activities into the workplace and the kibbutzim, placed a large anti-smoking advertisement in the basketball stadium of Tel Aviv, and broadcast anti-smoking advertisements at music festivals. In addition, the Association increased its psychological counseling services for smokers who wished to stop smoking.⁵⁶

51. ICA Annual Report (1988): 14.

52. Ibid., (1980): 18.

53. *Yediot Ahronot*, 25 December 1980; 26 March 1981; 18 August 1982; 10 March 1986.

54. On May 29, 2007, Channel 10 ran an Israel Cancer Association commercial.

55. ICA annual reports, 1980-1988.

56. ICA Annual Report (1991): 20, 22; see also the 1992 special 40th anniversary report; ICA Annual Report (1995): 17-19; Annual Report (1996): 11-15; Annual Report (1998): 14-17.

III. Religious Injunctions Against Smoking

Once the massive amount of information linking smoking to serious illness and an early death became part of the public domain, a number of prominent rabbis and religiously knowledgeable laymen began commenting on the issue of smoking and Jewish law and sought to dissuade religious Israelis from smoking.

An early rabbinical response to smoking appeared in a 1963 issue of the Histadrut Sick Fund magazine, *Aytanim*. The magazine reprinted an article that originally appeared in the Jerusalem-based Orthodox Yiddish weekly, *The Jewish Light*. The latter article presented the response of the famous nineteenth century rabbinical scholar, Israel Meir Ha-Kohen, better known as the Hafets Hayyim [literally, “He who wants to live”], to the question what he thought about smoking cigarettes. The rabbi responded that smoking was bad because it enslaved the smoker, thus limiting his freedom.⁵⁷

In a letter to the editor of *Ma’ariv*, a reader commented that the Torah commands that one should guard his soul. Since smoking endangers the body and the soul, religious Jews should not smoke.⁵⁸ Another reader commented that Jewish law strictly forbids suicide or harming oneself. Since research shows that smoking causes cancer and shortens the life span, smoking is a hidden form of self-destruction, a sort of suicide. Consequently, he said, more and more religious Jews prevent themselves from smoking.⁵⁹

In 1971, a rabbi connected to Hadassah hospital in Jerusalem opined that smoking transgressed Jewish law because it impacted one’s health.⁶⁰ In 1976, the Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Tel Aviv, Haim David Halevi, issued a religious ruling that smoking is forbidden by Jewish law. He said smoking is harmful, leading to cancer and heart disease.⁶¹ Three years later, Halevi reiterated his ruling.⁶² In 1984, Rabbi Mordecai Halprin explained that someone who smokes in public harms the health of people, thus endangering their lives. Consequently, smoking in public places is prohibited.⁶³

One of the world’s leading religious scholars, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, in the United States, wrote that smoking is forbidden in places of learning, because “the smokers cause real harm to life.”⁶⁴ Consequently, the heads of Yeshivot [religious schools of higher learning] began banning smoking in their classrooms because it does “real harm to life.”⁶⁵ A few years after this, an Israeli textbook written

57. *Aytanim*, November-December, 1963, pp. 412-413. Israel Meir Ha-Kohen (1838-1933) was born in and lived in Lithuania and was one of the most important and influential figures in Orthodox Judaism of the nineteenth century. For information on his life see Geoffrey Wigoder, *Dictionary of Jewish Biography* (New York, 1991), pp. 190-191.

58. *Ma’ariv*, 19 December 1974, p. 24.

59. *Ma’ariv*, 3 September 1978, p. 27.

60. *Yediot Ahronot*, 30 November 1971, p. 17.

61. *Yediot Ahronot*, 2 December 1976, p. n/a. See also *Aytanim*, January 1977, p. 14.

62. *Ma’ariv*, 8 March 1979, p. 23.

63. *Aytanim*, May, 1984, p. 134.

64. *Yediot Ahronot*, 13 August 1984, p. 16.

65. *Yediot Ahronot*, 13 August 1984, p. 16. This ruling was repeated ten years later (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, 28 August 1995, p.6).

especially for ultra-Orthodox students stated that Jewish law forbids smoking because it is harmful to health. As a way to influence the young, the text cited examples of prominent rabbis who stopped smoking for this reason. Rabbi Eliezer Shach, one of the country's most prominent and revered rabbis was among the rabbis cited.⁶⁶

On its website, the Masorti (Conservative) Movement in Israel issued a report in 1991, to answer the question, "In light of dozens of scientific studies proving the dangers of smoking, is smoking prohibited by Jewish law?" Their answer: "Since the Surgeon General's report first established the dangers of cigarette smoking in 1964, over forty *responsa* [written decisions given by eminent rabbis to questions they receive in writing] have been written on the subject. The majority of the responsa, whether given by Orthodox, Conservative or Reform rabbis, have ruled that cigarette smoking is prohibited by Jewish law."⁶⁷

All of this seems to have had some effect. At a meeting with representatives of the Israel Cancer Society in 1995, Rabbi Joshua Sheinberg, a member of an organization called "Medicine According to Religious Law," claimed that smoking among yeshiva students declined as a result of the religious rulings on smoking.⁶⁸ And a government report in 2001 said that the more Orthodox an individual was the less likely he/she is to smoke.

Religious Jews living outside Israel also contacted Israeli rabbis about smoking and Jewish law. In 1985, an Orthodox physician in New York asked the rabbis of Medicine According to Religious Law for their ruling on smoking. They informed him that "smoking is a sin according to Jewish law," which states that one must "guard your soul."⁶⁹

Thus, over the years, the link between smoking and illness led to religious rulings by Israeli rabbis that discouraged cigarette smoking among religious Jews.⁷⁰

IV. Government Initiatives

For decades, Israeli governments, including the Knesset and ministries, understood that smoking posed a serious risk to one's health. By 1961 the subject of smoking and the public's health generated enough concern to merit a full-scale debate in the Knesset. The discussion focused on "educating the public to the dangers of smoking."⁷¹ This led the government to undertake legislative and regulatory actions that resulted in warnings legislation, advertising restrictions, and public smoking restrictions. The government also undertook a long running set of programs, in conjunction with Israeli and international public health organizations, to reduce the prevalence of smoking in Israel.

66. *Ha'aretz*, 20 November 1988, p. 3.

67. *Moment* 16 (October 1991), pp. 14-15. Published on the Masorti website: www.masorti.org/mason/have/responsa/smoking.html

68. Israel Cancer Association (ICA), *Annual Report* (1996), p. 14.

69. *Ha'aretz*, 10 January 1985, p. 2.

70. In 1999, under the auspices of the Orthodox Rabbinical Council of America, a group of American Orthodox rabbis explained that "the smoking of cigarettes constitutes a blatant violation of the Torah's commandment against inflicting harm on oneself and hence is absolutely prohibited according to Jewish law." This statement appeared in the weekly Jewish newspaper, *The Forward*, in 1999, and is available on the internet site, drkoop.com.

71. *Yediot Ahronot*, 27 March 1961.

Local ordinances against smoking in buses existed in the early 1950s, and by the end of the decade the central government had also passed a law banning smoking in movie houses.⁷² Passage of these regulations stemmed, in part, from a general consensus among governmental officials that cigarette smoke in closed and unventilated places created an unpleasant environment and disturbed non-smokers.⁷³ Notwithstanding fines of offenders, the ordinances were widely ignored and only sporadically enforced.⁷⁴ Despite ongoing complaints from non-smokers, the situation remained problematic throughout the following decades.⁷⁵

Beginning in the 1960s, public health organizations, physicians groups, and concerned citizens, began pressuring the government to limit or abolish cigarette advertising in the media, in the hope that this would decrease cigarette purchases. At various times, the Ministry of Health lobbied members of Knesset to pass legislation to that effect, and from time to time some of them introduced laws to limit cigarette advertising. As a result of these efforts, in 1983 the government banned tobacco advertising on conventional electronic media, TV, and radio. Although young people spend hours a day online, this ban has not yet been extended to websites and the internet. Reacting to this new situation and to protect the youth, the ICA and the Israel Medical Association have mounted campaigns to ban tobacco advertising on the internet.⁷⁶

The Ministry of Health also joined the anti-smoking campaign instituted by the World Health Organization (WHO). This partnership began in the 1960s and continued thereafter. It consisted of Israel sending representatives to the various WHO conferences, participating in its committees, submitting reports detailing the results of Israeli research and surveys on smoking, participating in world wide “No-Smoking Days,” and publishing and distributing WHO materials detailing the negative impact of smoking on health.⁷⁷

At the same time, the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education undertook long-running programs to inform the public about the health risks of smoking, as well as helping smokers to quit. These involved working together in educational programs with public health organizations, such as the ICA, using electronic and print media to publicize the link between smoking and illness, opening offices in various locations to distribute advice and help, setting up no-smoking groups and information hot lines, printing and distributing thousands of pieces of literature on the subject of smoking and health, and enlisting public officials and personalities to help publicize the campaign.⁷⁸ To further bolster and publicize its

72.. *Davar*, 1 December 1950; 12 September 1957; 20 January 1958; *Ha'aretz*, 7August1950; March 3, 1951; 15 December 15, 1957; 9 April 1957; 18 February 1958; 9 March1958; 28 September 1958; *Ma'ariv*, 28 April 1950; July 1, 1958.

73. *Yediot Ahronot*, 29 January 1960, p. 4.

74.. *Ha'aretz*, 12 July1950; 7August 1950; 3 May 1951; 28 September 1953; 2 March 1955, 8 April1957; 9 November 1958; 14 January 1959; 3 May1959; *Ma'ariv*, 25 May 1951;14 April 1955; 18 February 1957; 18 April 1958.

75. *Yediot Ahronot*, 18 February 1960; 11 October1961; 25 October1966; 14 November 1968; *Davar*, 18 May 1962; 28 April1965; 11 September 1972; 22May 1974; 19 February 1979; *Ma'ariv*, 31 January 1960 (Jerusalem edition); 7 January 1963; 2 January1964; 20 February1964; 8 October1966; 22 January 1967; 3 December1970; 10 January1972, 11February1973; 13 May1975; 3 May 1976; 17 May 1978; 12 June1979; *Ha'aretz*, 17 January 1961; 25 July 1962; 31 March 1965, 20 October 1966; 5 September 1972; 28 May; *Ha'aretz* (English edition), 29 May 2002; *Nashastrana*_9 January 1973, no. 487; 2 December1974, no. 1061; 19 September 1979; 23 May1982; *Vesty*, 11 February 1993.

76. *Yediot Ahronot*, 26 November 1962; 3 October 1965; 2 February 1971; 16 November 1976; 22 March 1982; *Ma'ariv*, 16 June 1970; 16 November 1976; 12 January 1982; *Nashastrana*, 3 June 1982; and the Israel Medical Association Website, 21 May 2011.

77. *Yediot Ahronot*, 20 January 1964; 31 May 1999; *Ha'aretz* 6 October 1970; *Ha'aretz*, 19 April 1982. See also, “Israel” in “Tobacco or Health: A Global Status Report,” on the internet (29 May 2002).

stand against smoking, in 1984 the Ministry of Health brought U.S. Surgeon General Dr. C. Everett Koop to Israel. His visit and views against smoking received coverage in the press.⁷⁹

The ICA's support was crucial in the Knesset's eventually passing laws that regulated smoking in the areas of public life where it exerted control. In 1980, "No Smoking" signs were posted on buses and smoking was prohibited on all inter-city bus lines in 1982.⁸⁰ That same year, the Ministry of Transport banned smoking on all domestic and short overseas flights.⁸¹ In July 1983 the Knesset passed a nationwide law banning smoking in public places –buses, taxis, hospitals, clinics, elevators, public halls, movie houses, theaters, educational institutions, libraries, and pharmacies. The law took effect in February 1984 and mandated heavy fines for offenders.⁸² The public was aware of these regulations and a poll taken in 1986, showed that a majority of smokers also supported the ban.⁸³ Two years later the government passed a law banning smoking in restaurants containing twenty seating places.⁸⁴ Another law banning smoking in public places was put into effect in 1994, and a poll showed that 90 percent of the population supported the idea of creating tobacco-free zones.⁸⁵ In March 2001 a law was passed forbidding smoking in hospitals and clinics, except for designated smoking areas.⁸⁶

In 1983 the government passed a bill banning the advertising of cigarette and tobacco products on the radio and television, in movie houses, youth newspapers, and in public transportation. In addition, a health warning had to appear in the advertising of all tobacco products and on the packs of all cigarettes.⁸⁷ These were bills that the Israeli Cancer Association and the Israel Association to Prevent Smoking had advocated for many years.

In June 2003 a government report on smoking stated that more than a quarter of the adult population in Israel smoked. The report was based on surveys conducted by the National Center for Disease Control between 2001 and 2003. As a consequence of this report, the Health Ministry prepared legislation that would increase the size of the health warning appearing on cigarette packages.⁸⁸

Smoking in the army remained a serious problem. The army magazine, *B'mahaneh*, recorded the fact that smoking was widespread amongst soldiers, and more youngsters smoked by the time they left army service than when they entered.⁸⁹ For some time, parents, physicians and government officials had expressed concern over this fact.⁹⁰

78. *Ha'aretz*, 7 October 1970; *Ma'ariv*, 15 October 1971; 8 March 1973; 2 June 1980; 6 February 1987; *Yediot Ahronot*, 20 January 1972; 23 February 1973; 23 February 1979; *Nashastrana*, 2 December 1982.

79. *Ma'ariv*, 31 August 1984; 12 October 1984.

80. *Ma'ariv*, 13 February 1982; 18 August 1982.

81. *Ma'ariv*, 9 August 1982.

82. ICA Annual Report (1983): 20; *Ma'ariv*, 27 July 1983, 1 February 1984; 27 February 1984.

83. *Ma'ariv*, 25 March 1986.

84. *Yediot Ahronot*, 28 March 1988.

85. *Ibid.*, 15 February 1994; 12 July 1994. According to an October 2001 press report, the public persisted in ignoring the ban on smoking in public places. And the authorities displayed confusion and laxity in enforcing the regulations. *Ha'aretz* (English edition), 1 October 2001. The ignoring of the smoking ordinances caused the Woman's Zionist Organization, Hadassah, to organize a demonstration in front of the Jerusalem municipality on 28 May 2002. *Ha'aretz* [English edition], 29 May 2002.

86. *Ha'aretz* (English edition), 9 July 2002. Enforcement of this law encountered difficulties as some doctors and nurses continued to smoke in the departments, next to patients, and even in surgery wards.

87. *Yediot Ahronot*, 18 January 1983.

88. *Ha'aretz* (English edition), 2 June 2003.

89. From 1948, articles and photographs recorded the widespread smoking among soldiers. Surveys of smoking in the army appeared in *B'mahaneh*, 15 January 1986: 5; 25 March 1987: 15. A Ministry of Health report issued in May 2002 asserted that one-third of those who smoked in the army had been non-smokers when they began their army service (*Ha'aretz* [English Edition], 9 July 2002).

The massive amount of information linking smoking to illness moved the military to initiate programs aimed at reducing smoking amongst soldiers. In 1979, the then Chief of Staff, Raphael Eitan, ordered the military weekly, *B'mahaneh*, to stop accepting cigarette advertisements.⁹¹ By the 1980s the campaign included the publication of numerous anti-smoking articles in the magazine, a ban on cigarette advertising in the magazine, informational and educational programs, workshops to help soldiers stop smoking, and instituting “no smoking” and “health days” in the army.⁹²

Polls and surveys conducted in Israel over the years demonstrated that the public received the message that cigarette smoking is a major health risk. In 1973, *Ha'aretz* reported that 98 percent of the Israeli public knew that smoking posed a danger to health; and 84 percent knew that smoking could cause cancer.⁹³ By the 1990s, over 90 percent of those surveyed said they knew that smoking cigarettes posed a danger to their health.⁹⁴ The *Ha'aretz* newspaper affirmed this conclusion a decade later when it acknowledged "Everyone knows smoking is bad for your health."⁹⁵

Through the popular print and electronic media and through ongoing informational and educational programs and campaigns launched by the government, public health organizations, and the sick funds, since the 1950s the Israeli public has received an enormous amount of information linking smoking to cancers, heart disease, and a variety of other serious illness. Young people received information about the impact of smoking on their health from programs in their schools and through their youth newspaper. As a consequence of these efforts, the dangerous effects of smoking on health became part of the public's common knowledge and the number of smokers showed a decline over the years. Even so, during the first decade of the 21st century over twenty percent of the country's adults still continued to smoke.⁹⁶

90. *Davar*, 29 March 1964; *Yediot Ahronot*, 8 February 1974 (weekend supplement); 22 August 1984; *Ha'aretz* (English edition), 9 July 2002.

91. *Ma'ariv*, 5 September 1979.

92. *Yediot Ahronot*, 19 June 1987; 13 December 1987; *B'mahaneh*, 29 March 1980: 4; 11 June 1980: 4; 20 February 1985:7; 1 April 1987: 10; 18 August 1987: 26-27; 9 May 1990: 8; 13 May 1992: 9; 16 April 1997: 7.

93. *Ha'aretz*, 16 April 1973.

94. *B'mahaneh*, 13 January 1993:28-29. Letters to the editor as well as material in various articles appearing in *Ma'ariv L'noar* indicate that by the 1990s a large number of Israeli teenagers were aware of the dangers to their health posed by smoking cigarettes. See, *Ma'ariv L'noar*, 5 January 1992:8; 26 April 1992: 79; 9 August 1992: 67, 82; 3 January 1993:9; 31 December 1993:32; 4 February 1994:3; 13 October 1995:43; 13 September 1996: 8; 15 May 1997:54; 5 August 1999: 56.

95. *Ha'aretz* (English edition), 17 October 2002.

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