



*Revealing the inner beauty of the Torah in a way that touches and inspires the Jewish soul*

## ON CELLPHONES CIGARETTES AND LIFETIME QUOTAS

By: Rabbi & Mrs. Yehoshua Binyamin Falk

On January 4, 1954 six of the largest cigarette companies in the country and certain large tobacco growers got together and published "The Frank Statement" in the New York Times. In this full page ad they attempted to deflect growing concern with the health risks of smoking, announcing that they were aware of the experiments with mice that linked smoking with cancer, but claimed that the "experiments [were] not regarded as conclusive in the field of cancer research," and pledged "aid and assistance to the research effort into all phases of tobacco and health."

Over the last few decades, juries in courtrooms across the country have had to decide whether this statement was evidence of a massive conspiracy of silence among cigarette manufacturers who already knew all too well of the link between smoking and cancer or whether it accurately reflected the paucity of their knowledge at the time and their genuine interest in clarification.

In any event, no one today doubts that cigarette smoking causes lung cancer and other fatal illnesses. According to the American Cancer Society, the use of tobacco in its various forms, in the United States was responsible for 1 in 5 deaths. This means that hundreds of thousands of men and women die each year because of tobacco use.

Each year second hand smoke may be responsible for about 3,000 lung cancer deaths in non smoking adults and an additional 35,000 to 40,000 cases of heart disease in people who are not current smokers . At present still tens of millions of people in this country alone are still currently smoking.

In recent times has arisen a new potential health hazard as the number of cell phone users in the world has already reached the billions. There has been a flurry of research tending to show that cell phones may cause damage at the cellular/genetic level under laboratory conditions. A number of European institutes have done thorough studies that have showed that cells exposed to electromagnetic field similar to those emitted by cell phones showed significant increases in DNA strand breaks. However, some of the world's mobile phone makers are calling for more research and "awaiting evaluation by the scientific community." It is starting to sound a bit like the smoking and cancer controversy of the fifties and sixties. Okay, but is that all there is to the cell phone-cigarette connection - or is there something deeper here.

We are taught by our Sages that each of us is given a lifetime quota of words, however words that we use to learn Torah or words expended while fulfilling the Divinely designed beneficial deeds known as mitzvot, which include acts of kindness, are not deducted from this fund. Perhaps it can be inferred that unnecessary words are subtracted from the total. This makes sense because, as we may quietly admit to ourselves, we have been more often "tripped up" by our tongues than by our feet.

The extra "air time", now available to cell phone users for little or no extra cost could raise the total amount of time spent in conversation and thus statistically increase the potential for some of those conversations to be spiritually as well as physically detrimental. Both cell phones and cigarettes involve the use of our breath and in both cases - what is not so obvious is that the passive bystander can also be harmed. When cigarette smoke is exhaled, this so called, second hand smoke, has proven to be very dangerous to those exposed. Like the person who inhales second hand smoke, the person who merely listens to slander or gossip (richilus or loshon hara) can be as detrimentally affected by what is being said as is the speaker. The good news is that cell phones, unlike cigarettes, can and do have positive applications and can enhance the joy (simcha) of life by making traveling safer, by making plans easier and keeping relatives and friends more accessible.

Some scientific researchers have suggested that potential side effects can be minimized by keeping the cell phone itself



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away from the head and by also keeping the cell phone while on away from any vital organs. We might add one more suggestion to our cell phone do and don't list: Keep in mind our Heavenly "calling plan quota"!

A final upbeat note: Just as friends and lucrative business deals are instantaneously within our reach at all times and places, how much more so is the Creator always available - all we need to do is connect and speak up.

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First publication: Jewish Observer Magazine