

## Tackling the Tuition Crisis

■ It is nice to see the Orthodox Union finally address the American *frum* community's inability to sustain itself in its present state. Judaism here has quickly become a religion for only the most wealthy among us.

The Torah teaches us "*ani ve'ir*"—that we have to take care of our local community first before giving our money elsewhere. I do not think that there is an excuse for giving away money to Israel when our own schools are in dire straits and many of us are struggling. The solution isn't vouchers, lobbying politicians or looking for government handouts. Rather, it is a matter of setting our priorities straight when it comes to giving *tzedakah*.

I am sure that the *frum* community in America has the money to support itself, if we use it properly, as God intended.

**Richard Yosselman**  
Los Angeles

In his article, "In Defense of Tuition" (fall 2005), Dr. Nachum Klafter succinctly elucidates many of the challenges facing Jewish day schools. He correctly points out that tuition falls way short of the exorbitant cost of keeping a child in school. Comparing a Jewish day school to a "business," however, completely misses the mark. For a day school to be viable, it requires an infusion of additional funds, and it is simply unreasonable to expect that unrelenting tuition hikes should make up this deficit. Day schools must be subsidized in large part. The goal isn't simply the survival of the school, but the perpetuation of our values, our way

of life and, ultimately, our kind.

Dr. Klafter highlights a pivotal problem in Jewish education that unfortunately affects where we send our children, and sadly, how many children we have. There are families that express a desire for a third or fourth child but refuse to indulge this desire, citing exorbitant day school costs.

Furthermore, I strongly disagree with Dr. Klafter when he suggests that day schools should cement a minimum-tuition policy. This self-destructive policy would inevitably preclude many well-meaning but poor children from obtaining the ultimate Jewish value, a yeshiva education. Granted there will always be those who take advantage of seemingly lax tuition policies, but that is the price we must pay to ensure that not even one legitimate student is turned away because of a lack of means.

As an active member of our local day school, I am intimately aware of the oppressive financial burdens facing day schools. There is a limit as to what fundraisers can achieve, but it is imperative that we exhaust every possible resource before hiking tuition and implementing dangerous policies that would hinder access to even one Jewish soul. The Orthodox Union recently launched an initiative to address this very problem, and it is imperative that Jewish institutions do everything within their power to make a day school education available to every child.

**Noah Lindenberg, MD**  
Vice President  
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## Dr. Klafter responds

I appreciate Dr. Lindenberg's

## Jewish Action

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thoughtful comments on my article, and I admire his passionate commitment to provide a Jewish education for every single Jewish child. My disagreement with him boils down to one very simple and sober point: Jewish day schools run on money—not on sentiment.

I am very sympathetic to Dr. Lindenberg's assertion that the wider community "must" subsidize Jewish education, but I fear that simply saying this or writing it in *Jewish Action* will not make it a reality anytime soon. I would be absolutely delighted if the *rabbanim* of my community had the authority to persuade or compel all of their congregants and students to pay half of their *ma'aser* to our day school. I would also be delighted if the local federation would increase its already generous allocation from 13 percent of our operating expenses to 30 or 40 percent. However, doing so would entail cutting funding for various other worthy Jewish institutions in our city. (Yes, I—like most other *Jewish Action* readers—agree that schools should be prioritized ahead of all other Jewish institutions, but it appears that the wider community does not see eye to eye with us on this issue.)

I am not advocating that Jewish day schools set minimum-tuition requirements at levels that are so high that families will be driven from our schools. However, I do believe that the balance could be shifted a bit from the status quo. I think that it is very generous for a school board to offer a 70 to 75 percent discount to families of limited means. In such cases, the school board has to go out and fundraise for 70 to 75 percent of these costs, and the family (who is receiving the benefits of the school's services) has to pay or fundraise for the remaining 25 to 30 percent. In cases where it is truly not possible for a family of very limited means, IOU agreements or volunteer work for the school should also be considered.

Dr. Lindenberg's belief that comparing a school to a business "misses the mark" is shared by many people I have

spoken with. Actually, I do not compare schools to businesses; I contend that Jewish day schools *are* businesses. They are non-profit corporations that cannot operate unless their incomes cover their expenses every single year. Is it responsible to operate day schools in a manner where annual fundraisers are expected to generate 50 percent of the budget? We have made financial commitments to the *bnei Torah* whom we employ as teachers. What will happen if a school cannot meet a payroll for two months in a row? This is not an academic question. Ask around, and you will discover that many, many day schools have at some point been faced with inadequate funds to meet a monthly payroll. School budgets continue to rise, but there are fewer and fewer *gevirim* who are willing and able to write personal checks to cover a month of salaries when the school is short on cash. These situations become increasingly perilous for a day school's survival.

Finally, there is a separate issue of fiduciary responsibility for communal funds. Board members are entrusted with communal funds and resources, and have a responsibility to guard them from theft, waste or other types of unnecessary loss. To stand by and watch people steal from the resources that we have been charged to protect is not an act of *chesed*, but one of negligence.

### Remembering Dayan Berkovits

I was delighted to see the wonderful article written by Rabbi J. David Bleich ("In Memoriam, Rabbi Berel Berkovits: *Hadayan Hametzuyan*," fall 2005). Reb Berel, whom I knew for over thirty years, was a unique person, as mentioned by Rabbi Bleich, in that his background in learning was impeccable but he also had exposure to the academic world as a law lecturer at Buckingham College. I believe this gave him his particular ability to relate well to all kinds of Jews. He also exhibited an incredibly caring attitude, especially when he was the registrar at the London Beth Din, where he was for many Jews their first point of contact with the legal

face of Jewish life.

I personally became involved in a question of status regarding a set of twins (now in their forties) who were classified as *mamzerim* by a *beit din* in London many years ago, without any real examination of the circumstances. When I brought this situation to Reb Berel's attention, he told me to tell these individuals to come and see him. After a prolonged investigation it turned out that there was a major case for annulling the *mamzerut*. He literally changed lives, and I feel very blessed to have been his friend. The world is certainly a poorer place without leaders of his caliber.

**Rabbi Ian Shaffer**  
Adjunct Professor of Bible  
Stern College for Women  
New York

### HODS Advertisement

I apologize to Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner for publicizing the fact that he holds a HOD Society organ donor card when he did not want this information revealed (fall 2005). A HOD office employee mistakenly sent a list of more than one hundred RCA rabbis who have our organ donor card to the graphic artist to make a new advertisement without seeing the note in our database not to use Rabbi Torczyner's name.

As soon as Rabbi Torczyner brought this mistake to my attention, I immediately apologized and pulled all our advertisements from different magazines and newspapers until the mistake could be corrected. In addition, HOD destroyed 3,000 flyers, plus a 2,000-piece mailing that was already stuffed, sealed and stamped because they included the advertisement.

The HOD Society takes confidentiality seriously, and we have already undertaken corrective measures to ensure that this mistake does not happen again.

**Robby Berman**  
Founder and Director  
HOD Society  
New York

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