

KNAS SYSTEM – YES OR NO

Question:

My 16 year old son attends a wonderful Yeshiva, *B'H*, and we are very pleased with his progress. I am wondering if you feel that there is a benefit to the '*knas*' system, where students are obligated to pay money for infractions. If so, what is the proper way to implement it?'

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Answer:

I think that a *knas* system is a system that should be abolished as it accomplishes practically zero. I personally went through the *knas* system to no avail.

I would like to share with you two examples. One example was of eating in the classroom. Students were not allowed to eat in the classroom. When I, as principal, came into the classroom and asked "who ate here today?" always with a smile and a happy demeanor, it was known that all those who owned up had to pay a *knas* of \$2.00. I am sure that no one lied as it would have been a public acknowledgement of lying. It accomplished absolutely nothing. Students continued to eat in the classroom as freely as before the *knas* was instituted. Because they knew that the monies collected went to *tzedaka*, they were happy to be able to give *tzedaka* and eat in the classroom. If the fine had been much greater, then it would have been abusive and counterproductive. Students are supposed to enjoy school and are not supposed to be sitting in fear of large financial penalties.

Another example was that on the first day of school, students were required to bring an admission slip showing that all registration requirements were taken care of. Any high school student who forgot her admission slip at home, was sent to the office and charged \$.50 for a new one, in order to help teach her a sense of responsibility. Year after year, the line-ups at the office on the first day increased instead of decreased. We accomplished zero.

How then can a *knas* teach anything, whether it is as little as \$.50, \$2.00 or the abusiveness of \$100 or more, as is the case in many of our schools? The one receiving the *knas* always rationalizes to himself that it is never his fault or feels it is just not fair. Pray tell what is gained? A *knas* which involves a large sum of money and causes a family and/or school tumult, can create the impression that the *knas* is extortion. Furthermore, taking money from another, without mutual agreement, can lead to laxity on the part of the student in many *halachic* areas.

I plead with all schools that still have such a system, to look at the accomplishments versus the loss in student/school relations. *Yotzo schoro b'hefsedo* – the good accomplished is lost by the negativism involved. A student's perception of his school and what he acquires from it is measured by how much or little is learned. The happier the student is, the more he learns; the unhappier he is, the less he learns and the less *yiras shomayim* he acquires.