

**THE BLOG**

# Elite Eyeballs for Sale

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By Marty Kaplan

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A full-page ad in the national edition of the daily *New York Times* will set you back more than \$154,000, if you fall in the category of “advocacy/cause and appeal/political/philanthropy.” (A Sunday ad in the global edition, which includes the *International Herald Tribune*, costs nearly \$213,000.)

I know this because I looked it up, spurred by an email I got from the editor of *Tikkun*, Rabbi Michael Lerner, who is looking for contributions at \$300 a pop to fund an ad on behalf of the group he heads, the Network of Spiritual Progressives.

“We’ve agonized about the enormous expense of this effort,” he said in his message, “but in the end we decided that we have no choice: this unequivocal peace perspective has been almost entirely blocked out by the Western media. Over the course of the past few weeks, every attempt we’ve made to reach the media—by issuing press statements, speaking to journalists and TV reporters, or publishing op-ed pieces—has been denied.”

Reaching the media, of course, isn’t the real objective; it’s the means for reaching the public, and particularly the elites - the elected officials, decision-makers, and influencers who pay attention to the *Times*, the *Washington Post* and other prestige outlets.

It shouldn’t be surprising that getting a message out takes serious money. Political candidates, frustrated by the lack of “free media” their campaigns get from local tv news (despite the public interest obligations those broadcasters promise to fulfill in exchange for their free licenses), have long been accustomed to paying big bucks to place ads on those stations. The public relations industry flourishes because people believe that reaching the media requires pricey professional help. Washington is now home to hundreds of well-funded faux think-tanks, phony grass-roots groups and Potemkin coalitions whose sole purpose is to convince news outlets to take their letterheads and viewpoints seriously.

What’s odd is the monopoly on elite attention that the prestige press seems still to maintain. You’d think that new technology would by now have created a way for Rabbi Lerner and those who agree with him to get their viewpoint into the media mix, without his having to raise and spend a couple hundred grand. You’d think that their “Progressive Middle Path” in the Middle East would be interesting enough to editors and producers to grab their attention without

requiring the Network of Spiritual Progressives to buy a billboard smack in the middle of the elite's daily media feed. And if it's true of one group's efforts to get noticed, it's doubtless true of more.

A million people marching in Washington gets the media's attention. So does a saffron-robed, self-immolating monk. So does a baby down a well, a runaway bride or a missing blonde. How did it turn out to be that the last-resort way for an actual idea to capture the elite's eyeballs is by considerably fattening a big media corporation's quarterly bottom line?

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