**Personal Statement**

I first discovered my passion for criminal law when I was assigned my first appeal as a law clerk for Honorable Justice Yoram Danziger at the Israeli Supreme Court. The appellants, two teenagers convicted of robbery, were each sentenced to ten years of imprisonment. Their lawyer passionately argued that their punishment was unduly harsh, especially given their young age. I remember looking at these kids, thinking that even though they had been charged with a serious offense, everyone deserves a second chance. Justice Danziger accepted the appeal, reducing their sentences by half. He reasoned that rehabilitation—and not only deterrence, retribution, and detention—is a core objective of the criminal legal system. Working on this case was a formative experience for me, providing me with insight into the incredible impact of judges on people’s lives and on society as a whole, especially in criminal law cases. It reminded me once again why I chose to devote my professional life to legal practice, with the ultimate goal of becoming a criminal law judge.

My ambition to become a criminal law judge had ignited already during my years as a law student, while representing indigent defendants as a student attorney at the Tel-Aviv University (TAU) Criminal Justice Clinic. It was then that I realized that judicial decision-making entails a subtle balancing between the interests of the public on the one hand and the due process rights of defendants on the other. I became even more intrigued with the criminal legal landscape while serving as a legal intern in the white-collar crimes department at Goldfarb-Zeligman, one of Israel’s largest and most prestigious law firms. During this internship, I conducted legal research on white-collar crime and prepared litigants for trial, gaining more insight into defendants’ psychology and motivations.

As a Senior Law Clerk with the Israeli Supreme Court, I was able to integrate my passion for criminal law with judicial practice. I drafted judicial opinions in cases of severe crimes and high-powered corruption, including the appeals of both the former Israeli President, Moshe Katsav, who had been convicted of rape and sexual harassment, and the former Prime Minister of Israel, Ehud Olmert, who had been convicted of bribery. These high-profiled cases, in which the top leaders were prosecuted, demonstrated that everyone is equal under the law, and reinforced my understanding of the crucial role that the criminal legal system plays in preserving democracy—particularly when such serious public interests are at stake.

During my clerkship at the Court, I became closely acquainted with the contours of the judicial decision-making process. I had the incredible opportunity to draft judicial opinions spanning a wide array of subject matters (including criminal justice, refugee law, and constitutional and administrative law), while conducting comprehensive legal research in civil and criminal appeals and in public petitions to the High Court of Justice. Upon completing my clerkship year, I accepted Justice Danziger’s invitation to serve as his senior law clerk. As a senior law clerk, I assisted Justice Danziger in every aspect of his work, gaining an even more intimate familiarity with the judicial decision-making process. I was assigned to handle the judge’s most complicated and controversial cases, which often necessitated the promulgation of new judicial precedents. Many of these cases involved resolving highly complex legal questions with major policy implications. While closely assisting Justice Danziger, I learned to articulate multifaceted legal arguments, to conduct rigorous comparative legal research, and to reason through the policy consequences of potential rulings and legal outcomes. While at the Court, I was honored to receive the Supreme Court Highest Honor for outstanding achievements, awarded annually to an excellent law clerk based on the judges’ recommendations.

After five years of clerking, I decided to gain experience as a legal practitioner, realizing that such practice is invaluable for a judicial career. Equipped with the analytical skills I had developed as a law clerk, I decided to take an independent path and co-found a law firm of my own with one of my colleagues. Here, I learned how to manage cases, develop litigation strategies, and argue before different judges and courts, including the Israeli Supreme Court. For the past four years at my own firm, I have further refined my legal expertise, gaining invaluable hands-on experience and spearheading litigation for some of the most challenging, and important cases. As a founding partner, I also had to confront with various management and entreprenuship challenges, and have developed the tools to succesfully overcome them.

Whereas my recent years as a litigator have provided me with invaluable practical experience, I now wish to refine my research skills and enhance my expertise in legal theory and doctrine, by pursuing advanced legal studies at Chicago Law School.

In Israel, judges are not only required to demonstrate legal expertise in their local legal system, but also to be familiar with the common-law systems, upon which the Israeli legal system is based. Furthermore, judges (especially in higher courts) are expected to be able to conduct comparative legal research, and to integrate comparative analysis into their judgments. The American legal system and its precedents have strongly influenced the Israeli legal system. I therefore wish to obtain an advanced degree at a leading U.S. law school, in preparation for a judicial position in my home country.

Chicago’s LL.M. program will provide me with an outstanding opportunity to expand my familiarity with American law and the U.S. legal system. The program will also enable me to further cultivate my skills in comparative legal research and writing. At Chicago, I will be exposed to diverse perspectives and to an unparalleled learning experience, while working closely with Chicago Law School’s renowned faculty in the fields of judicial decision-making, and criminal legal justice. In particular, I hope to attend the Money and Criminal Justice seminar (instructed by Professor John Rappaport) and the Workshop on Judicial Behavior (instructed by Professors Easterbrook, Epstein, Hutchinson, Landes, and Posner). I hope to contribute from my experiences to class discussions, and I look forward to participating in the uniquely collaborative learning atmosphere that characterizes Chicago’s LL.M. program.

I believe that my academic education and practical background have prepared me well for joining Chicago Law School. While earning my LL.B. and LL.M degrees (*magna* *cum laude*) from TAU Law School, I acquired both strong theoretical foundations and independent research abilities. During my studies, I also engaged in various extracurricular activities. For example,I served as the editor-in-chief of *TAU Law Review*, as a research assistant in inheritance law (for Professor Daphna Haker), and as a teaching assistant in unjust enrichment law (for Professor Ofer Grosskhopf). All of these experiences helped me develop strong analytical skills and critical legal thinking.

In addition to these academic endeavors, I also sought opportunities to enhance my knowledge of human rights law. As a Tikvah Human Rights Fellow in Princeton University, I participated in firm debates over current human rights challenges with leading experts, activists, and judges. During my studies, I also visited the German Max-Planck Institutes as a constitutional and comparative law research fellow. My involvement in legal academia continued after the completion of my law degree, as I co-authored an article on judicial interpretation of contracts.[[1]](#footnote-1) These experiences have equipped me with the ability to contribute to Chicago Law School’s academic discourse.

I am especially eager to study at Chicago Law next year, as my spouse (Meirav Furth-Matzkin) was recently invited to pursue a post-doctoral fellowship at the Law School, and we will relocate to Chicago this summer. I am confident that Chicago Law’s countless leading programs—such as the Federal Criminal Justice Clinic, the Criminal and Juvenile Justice Project, and the Prosecution and Defense Clinic—will provide an unparalleled academic experience, invaluable for my professional and academic enrichment. Moreover, through active involvement at some of these clinics and programs at Chicago, I look forward to contribute from my own knowledge and experience to the advancement of criminal justice.

1. Yoram Danziger & Zvi Matzkin,*"Do the Parties Regain Control Over Their Contract Following the Amendment Number 2 to Contract Law (General Section) 1973?* 15 Law & Business L. Rev. 27 (2012) (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)