

The Mix

78 ONE IN A MILLION

82 SECOND THOUGHTS

87 CONCENTRIC CIRCLES



A Potpourri of Encounters and Impressions



Capital Gains

Whether it's about protecting your rights as a religious employee or promoting school choice legislation, there's someone to vouch for you

Day in the Life

A.D. Motzen

is the national director of state relations for Agudath Israel of America

What I do

I oversee Agudath Israel's state-advocacy efforts across the country. Not alone, of course. There's a team of paid staff and volunteers, 15 people, working to help protect your right to religious practices like bris milah and *shechitah*, protecting your rights as a religious employee, and helping enact school choice legislation, to name a few.

What that means

Most of our work relates to education and religious freedom, things like kosher laws. So when a conservative rabbi in Georgia sued the state five years ago because he said kosher labeling laws are unconstitutional, we worked many hours with a Jewish legislator rewriting the law to protect kosher consumers. We spend a lot of time

organizing grassroots campaigns, lobbying legislators, and drafting bills.

The easiest part about training for this job

What training? My old boss came to my first meeting in the Ohio Statehouse and then left me on my own. All kidding aside, he was a great mentor. I had graduated from Johns Hopkins University with a degree in special education, and my goal was to change special education in the *frum* community. I had a few offers for principal positions, but around that time, two opportunities came up — someone in Cincinnati was looking for someone to help grow the community, and Rabbi Yehiel Kalish, who was the regional director for Agudath Israel Midwest at the time, was looking for someone to work ten hours a week in Columbus and monitor school

In Brief:

When I was a kid

I planned to graduate from McGill University in Montreal, where I grew up, and make my first million before I turned 30. I got into McGill but never attended, and no, I'm still not a millionaire. On the other hand, I've had a hand in generating millions of dollars for our community — even better.

What I appreciate most about working for Agudath Israel

Whenever we have questions of policy affecting the community, we turn to the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah. I've asked the *rosh yeshivah* of Telshe Chicago, Rav Avrohom Chaim Levin, many questions over the years, and it's always an honor and a privilege.

Equipment I always have

The Tefillas Haderech on the back of my Agudah membership card.

Compliment I receive most often

"What law school did you attend?"



choice legislation. I took both jobs, and we quickly realized that if we would be successful in expanding school choice, we would be successful in growing the Cincinnati community, as well. People have actually moved here because of these \$4,250-vouchers. Within two years, Agudah started handing me other states — Texas, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, Georgia, Tennessee. I know, as a region it makes no sense; I used to joke that my boss failed geography. Finally my title caught up with my job, and I became the national director of state relations.

VIPs I've met

While my office is decorated with pictures of me with dozens of politicians — governors, presidential candidates — I'll admit that most wouldn't remember my name. My job is to deal with state-level politics, not Washington — that's Rabbi Abba Cohen's domain. The exception is when the people I develop relationships with on the state level get elected to Congress. For example, Congressman Luke Messer of Indiana is now the fifth-highest ranking member of the House. Impressive, considering he only entered Congress in 2013. I worked closely with Luke when he oversaw the effort to pass school choice legislation in Indiana, and I've kept up with him since then. If you've never heard of him, you will — he's a rising star.

Why relationships matter

One issue we work on is avoiding unnecessary autopsies, and together with Rabbi Elchonon Zohn from the National Association of Chevra Kadisha, we've made many presentations to medical examiners and coroners. States like

If I need a break during work, I'll

organize my desk.

Ohio, Maryland, New Jersey, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Virginia have actually changed their protocols to accommodate people with religious objections. These presentations are important, because most medical examiners are just trying to do their jobs; they're willing to help if circumstances allow and they have a relationship with the community. Once I caught a pathologist just as he was entering the room to perform an autopsy. It was a homicide, so an autopsy was necessary, but I asked him to follow Rabbi Zohn's protocol to minimize invasiveness. He told me it was the first time he ever did so in the more than 10,000 autopsies he performed in his career, and he asked me to give a presentation to his entire staff. Our most memorable presentation was at the National Association of Medical Examiners conference — there were 400 medical examiners there. I like to say we take a three-pronged approach to this issue: education, legislation, and if there's no other choice, litigation.

How we're making the workplace a better place

I remember a strange case involving a city councilman who was challenged by a disgruntled citizen for wearing a yarmulke at council meetings. The complaint had no basis, but we reached out to Marc Stern of the American Jewish Congress, and he provided the city with a legal memo on the topic. We've also had cases involving taking time off, or in the case of university students, missing exams, because of Shabbos or Yom Tov. Earlier this year, a university student in New Jersey was told that if she left class early on Friday to get home for Shabbos, she would fail the course. A few phone

Like father, like son

I think I take after my dad Cantor Yaakov Motzen. He's a famous *chazzan* — we both use our mouths for our jobs. Also, I grew up watching him serve his *kehillah* in many ways, from giving classes to participating in life cycle events, and I like to think our work at the Agudah accomplishes that as well.

Best advice I ever got

Work like a dog, give others the credit, and never expect anyone to say thank you. Thank you for the advice, Moshe Bane — it's so true!

I'm in a good mood when

Someone reads our newsletter and says, "Wow, I had no idea Agudah did so many things."

calls later, and the professor received a note in middle of a Friday class. I don't know what it said, but he ended class early for everyone that day.

My biggest accomplishment

Hiring and training my replacement in Ohio. This is a job that's built on relationships and institutional memory, and in such a position, you can start feeling irreplaceable. Eighteen months ago, I hired Rabbi Yitz Frank straight out of *kollel*, and he continues to impress.

The best part of the job

Watching how a bill really becomes a law — as opposed to whatever you learned in social studies class. Then watching how some of these policies have a real impact on people's lives. There are five tuition voucher programs here in Ohio, and they're benefiting hundreds of families who choose to send their children to Jewish day schools. In Georgia, for seven years now, more than \$15 million has been generated in a scholarship tax credit program. The greatest thank you I ever received was from a financially struggling father whose kindergarten-aged child would receive a voucher every year until he finished elementary school. The man picked me up and gave me eight bear hugs, one for each year he wouldn't see a tuition bill.

After he put me down, I told him the voucher program includes kindergarten — that's nine years of vouchers, so I deserved one more hug.

The worst time of day

Thirty minutes before my flight; unfortunately, that's often when I get to the airport — and start running. I travel

out of town one or two days a week, but I try very hard to be home at night, and I'm proud to say I've been away from my wife for Shabbos only three times in ten years. Last week was crazy. I traveled to Columbus for a Statehouse Mission on Thursday, flew to DC for a dinner, and returned on a 6:30 a.m. flight on Friday. I spent that Shabbos sick in bed with strep, and then flew to Chicago on Sunday to speak at a parent rally for school choice. Monday I had a lunch meeting with community leaders in Denver. This job is never boring, but spring is the most hectic season; legislative sessions are wrapping up in many states, and our annual dinner is in May. We rely on donations, so I have to balance fundraising, commenting on bills, and helping our state directors with their efforts.

Best referral ever

Eric Cantor, the former majority leader in the US House, has a very strong relationship with Agudah. He also has a phenomenal memory. He once turned to my congressman and advised him to get to know me and the Agudah, "the only national Orthodox Jewish grassroots organization in the country." He said, "Not only are they good on the issues, but they can connect you to anyone you need on the ground." That's quite a recommendation!

I know it'll be a rough day if

My assistant is out on a Friday. That's when we send out the weekly newsletter, and if she's out, it gets tough — material is still coming in, and we're very tight for time. It's almost like putting out a weekly magazine....