

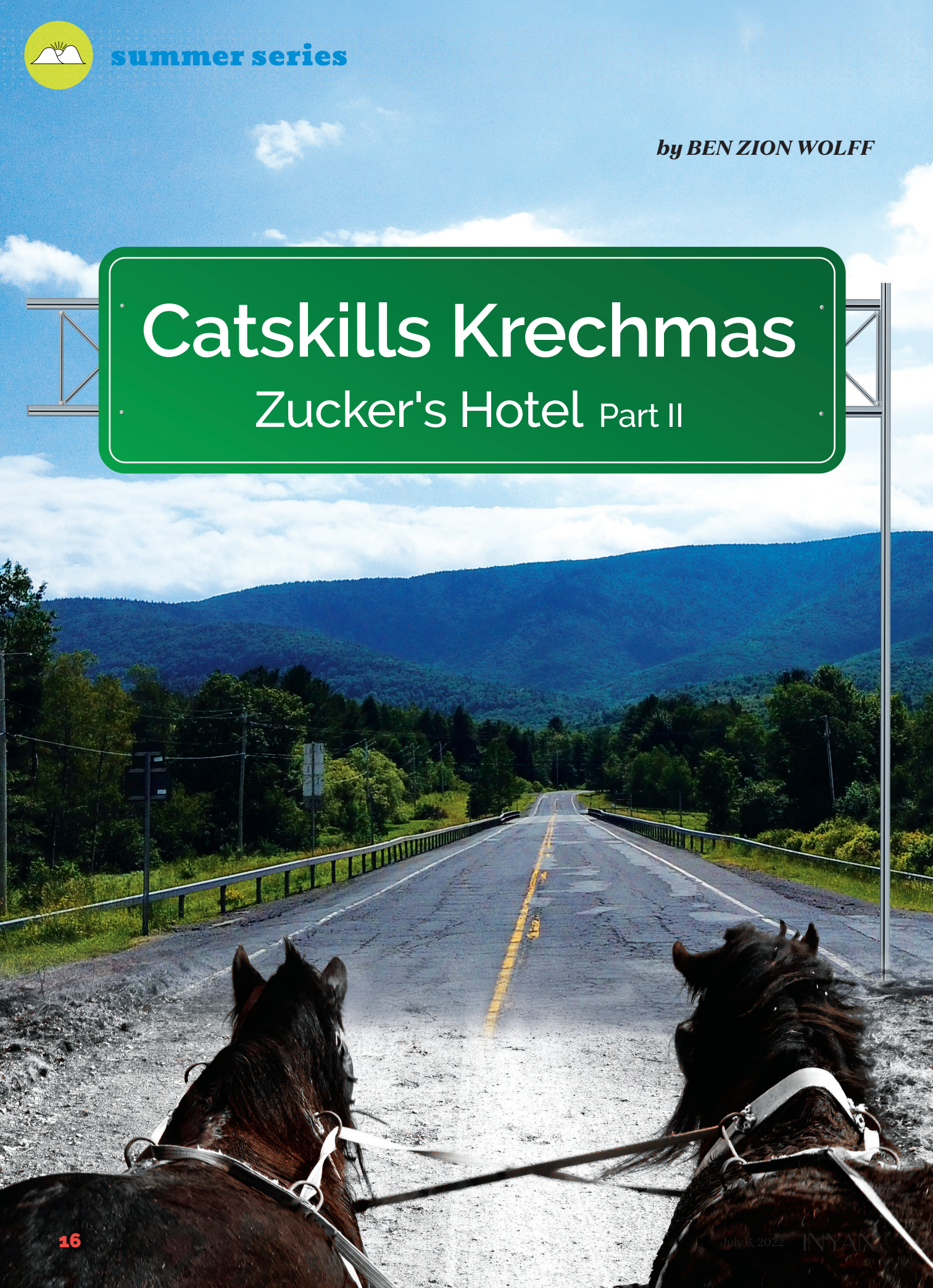


summer series

by BEN ZION WOLFF

Catskills Krechmas

Zucker's Hotel Part II



Zucker's Glen Wild Hotel was an iconic retreat where many Gedolei Torah spent a week or two during the summer, relaxing from their burdensome schedules and recharging, as they took in the fresh country air.

In Part II, we will discuss how these Gedolim, even while on vacation, were ready to serve Klal Yisrael and influence all who were fortunate to be in their presence.

Hagaon Harav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l

"Hagaon Harav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, spent two memorable summers at our hotel," Reb Baruch Zucker related. "During the day, he sat by a tree near the edge of the property learning from his *seforim*. Occasionally, a messenger would run down the steps from the office and inform the *Rosh Yeshiva* that someone was on the telephone waiting to ask him a *she'eilah*. Rav Moshe would hurry up the stairs to take the phone call and then return immediately to his learning.

"I once wondered why Rav Moshe felt compelled to be available to reply to *she'eilos* even during the few weeks when he was supposed to relax. I once heard Harav Bick say, 'Tzu dem iz men dah, mehn darfenferen un tuhn — This is what we are here (in this world) for, we must answer and do.' Rav Moshe had the same attitude. However, my father did whatever he could to prevent Rav Moshe from being interrupted by frivolous questions. If he saw that someone was pestering the *Rosh Yeshiva* with trivial matters, he would firmly tell the person to leave the *Rosh Yeshiva* alone."

Although Reb Shmuel Zucker shielded Rav Moshe somewhat, Rav Moshe saw himself as one of the guests in the hotel. During the Nine Days, Rav Moshe would make a *siyum* in the dining room and would tell all the hotel guests that they were permitted to partake of the *fleishig seudas mitzvah*. The *Poskim* write that the only people permitted to join the *seudah* are those people the *mesayeim* — the person making the *siyum* — would invite under normal circumstances (were it not the Nine Days). Nevertheless, Rav Moshe *paskened* that since everyone ate their meals together in one dining room, they could be considered regular guests for the meal, and they were permitted to eat a *fleishig* meal. (It was on this *psak* of Rav Moshe that several sleep-away camps allowed all their campers to eat at the *seudah* of a *siyum*.) "Despite the *psak*, there were several individuals who insisted on eating *milchig* and did not eat at the *siyum*," Reb Baruch recalled.

Early one morning, Rav Moshe sat learning in the *beis medrash* of the hotel before *davening*, when Harav Yehudah Lemberger, zt"l, the Szerencser Rav, brought Rav Moshe a cup of hot coffee. Rav Moshe thanked him, and sipped the coffee as he learned. When Harav Lemberger noticed that Rav Moshe had finished his drink, he quickly made his way to his table and lifted the empty cup to dispose of it.

Rav Moshe protested, saying, "It was enough that you were *mechabed* me by bringing me the drink. You don't have to clear off the used cup for me."

To this, Harav Lemberger had a ready reply. "On Yom Kippur, the *Kohen Gadol* not only brought the *kafumachtah* — the spoon filled with *ketores* and firepan filled with coals — into the *Kodesh HaKodashim*, he removed them as well. This teaches us that *hotzo'as kafumachtah* — removing items after they have been used — is also a worthy *avodah*."

"One morning, Rav Moshe came to breakfast and went to the coffee station to make himself a cup of coffee," said Rabbi Moshe Yanofsky, who worked in Zucker's for six years. "A waiter came over and offered to make the coffee for him, but Rav Moshe waved him off saying he could make it himself. When the waiter told Rav Moshe that this was his job, Rav Moshe relented, saying that if this was his job, he would allow him to serve him. After breakfast, Rav Moshe went to make another cup of coffee, but this



Harav Moshe Feinstein, learning under the tree, would run up the stairs to answer phone calls with *shailos*.

time he did not allow the waiter to serve him saying, "You already did your job, and now I can serve myself."

Harav Shneur Kotler, zt"l

Another prominent guest of the hotel was Harav Shneur Kotler, zt"l, who spent some memorable summers, as well as some time off-season, at Zucker's.

"The first time Rav Shneur came was while his illustrious father, Hagaon Harav Aharon Kotler, zt"l, was still alive, and Rav Shneur was not yet serving as *Rosh Yeshiva*. He came with his family, and during *seudah shlishis* he spoke in a manner which enthralled everyone. He went on and on, explaining many words of *Chazal* in the most beautiful way. Although he went way past the *zman* for *Maariv*, the guests just couldn't get enough and sat there spellbound, listening to the sweet pearls emanating from his mouth."

Shmuel Zucker and his wife would stay on grounds from Pesach until Succos, and at times there would be some guests who would come to the hotel during those off-season periods. One year, Rebbetzin Rishel Kotler was not well before Pesach, and the family spent Yom Tov at the hotel. Rabbi Moshe Yanofsky was the waiter for the tables of Rav Shneur and Harav Yaakov Yoffen, zt"l, *Rosh Yeshiva* of Novardok, and when the *seudah* was over they vied for the *zechus* of inviting their server to join them.

"I ended up spending some time by each table, and it was an unbelievable experience," Rabbi Yanofsky related. "When Yom Tov was over, Rav Shneur wanted to give me a tip of fifty dollars. I refused to take it, and said that the money would go to better use in Bais Medrash Govoha. After Yom Tov, Mr. Zucker told me that Rav Shneur gave him the fifty dollars and insisted he give it to me as a bonus. I also recall that because Mr. Zucker wanted me to earn some much-needed



Harav Shneur Kotler walking on the grounds of Zucker's Hotel.

Prestigious Guests at Zucker's

Other guests who stayed at the hotel included: Harav Mordechai Shulman, Harav Aharon Cohen, Harav Avraham Shkop and his son-in-law Harav Zelig Epstein, Harav Yaakov Halberstam (Tschakava Rebbe, father of Harav Moshe Halberstam of Yerushalayim), Harav Avraham Joffen, Harav Yehudah Leib Nekritz, Harav Yosef Dovid Epstein, Harav Dovid Ochs from Toronto, Harav Yossel Ashkenazi (*gabbai* of the Satmar Rebbe, zy"l), Harav Shmuel Kamenetsky, Harav Mendel Zaks and his son Rav Gershon and son-in-law Harav Gershon Weisenfeld, and Harav Tuvia Goldstein, *zecher tzaddikim livrachah*.

money, he had me serve eighty people and gave me two busboys instead of one so I would be able to service all of them properly."

Another year, Rav Shneur and his family came off-season, and Harav Abba Berman, zt"l, who was first a *Maggid Shiur* in Mir Yeshiva before he opened Yeshivas Iyun Hatalmud in Far Rockaway (later in Monsey and Yerushalayim), was a guest that Shabbos as well.

"During *krias haTorah*, the *baal korei* noticed that there were two words which were written very close together so that it seemed as if they were one word. He called over Rav Shneur to *pasken* if it invalidated the *sefer Torah*," said Reb Baruch. "Rav Shneur, in his great humility, deferred to Harav Abba Łódźer (*the person from Lodz*, as Harav Berman was known in the Mir, where they called people after their hometown). Rav Abba ruled that a child of average intelligence should read the words, and if he read it correctly as two words, it would be kosher. The *halachah* in this situation is that the child mustn't be too advanced since he may then guess the correct way to read it by associating it with the rest of what it written on the line.

"They called up Rav Shneur's young son Malkiel, and he quickly read the line and read the words properly. Due to the skill with which he read the words, they decided that he was too advanced, and they then called up his younger brother, Meir z"l, who read the line, albeit correctly, but much more

punctiliously. Based on his reading, they ruled the *sefer Torah* was kosher and continued *leining* from it."

Harav Mendel Krawiec, zt"l

Harav Mendel Krawiec, zt"l, the *Rosh Yeshiva* of Rabeinu Yaakov Yosef (RJJ) came often to spend time in the hotel. Reb Baruch, a *talmid* of Rav Mendel, recalled, "Indeed, Rebbetzin Rashel Krawiec, a"l, continued coming even after her husband was *niftar*. About 25 years ago, I overheard Reb Moshe Zupnick, z"l, a *talmid* of the Mirrer Yeshiva in Europe and Shanghai, telling Rebbetzin Krawiec that she saved his life.



Wedding of Baruch and Sheva Zucker. (L to R) Yisroel Meir Hirsch, Harav Mendel Krawiec, Mr. Shmuel Yitzchok (Sam) Zucker, Baruch Zucker.

The talmidim of the Mir received transit visas through Japan which they needed in order to leave Russia from Chiune Sugihara, the Japanese vice-consul in Kovna (Kaunas), Lithuania. In addition, they needed an exit visa from Russia, and the Vaad Hayeshivos in Vilna had possession of them. Reb Moshe had been the conduit to obtaining the transit visas and had worked for weeks to help Sugihara fill out thousands of these visas.

When Reb Moshe approached Harav Aharon Berek, the mazkir (secretary) of the Vaad Hayeshivos, to obtain the coveted Russian exit visa, he was hesitant to give him one. Rav Aharon's daughter, Rebbetzin Rashel Krawiec, told her father, 'Im gist du nisht? You are not giving him one? He did all the work!' Because of her intervention, Reb Moshe Zupnick was able to leave Russia with the Mir and remained with them throughout the war years in Shanghai.

Sukkos at Zucker's

"Many people lived in apartment buildings in the Bronx, Brownsville, and other neighborhoods during the 1950s and 1960s, and they could not build a *sukkah*. They had to walk to a communal *sukkah* for their meals, often blocks away from their homes. For convenience, some went to hotels for *Sukkos*, and for several years, until people moved to other neighborhoods, we had a nice crowd for *Sukkos*," said Reb Baruch. "The first year we

The *Sukkah* with the retractable *shlock*.



opened for Yom Tov, we even had many who stayed for Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah, but in subsequent years most of the guests went home after Hoshanah Rabbah.

"In order to accommodate the guests, Mr. Zucker built a building with a retractable *shlock* that served as the children's dining room during the summer season and as a *sukkah* for the guests during Yom Tov. In addition to the big *sukkah*, we had a smaller *sukkah* on the porch near the tea room where the guests could grab a snack without having to carry it to the big *sukkah*. During Chol Hamoed in the late 1950s, Rabbi Avraham Respler, z"l, came with some of his *chaveirim* and *pravahed* a majestic *simchas beis hasho'eivah* with beautiful *niggunim* in the small *sukkah*. We also had an *aravah* bush growing near the hotel where the guests were able to cut *aravos*."

Pesach in the Hotel

Pesach brought a distinctive group of guests hosted by the Zucker family in various settings. "We had many esteemed Rabbanim and their families who came year after year, including Rabbi Shabsi Frankel, Rabbi Ronnie Greenwald, and Harav Aharon Zlotowitz with his son and family," Reb Baruch said. "Harav Yaakov Moshe Kulefsky, zt"l, who was my Rebbi in Yeshiva Ner Yisroel in Baltimore, was our guest for one Pesach as well.

"One year, when erev Pesach fell on Shabbos, I set up some *bilkas* and a washing station, for those who wanted to eat *chametz* on Shabbos morning, in the casino building which was in the small bungalow colony we had next door. The building was outside of the *eiruv*, which ensured that no one would bring any *chametz* back into the hotel building. Several years later, we rented the Bel Fior Hotel in South Fallsburg (later la Vista Hotel run by Reb Baruch's brother, and today the Viznitz Girls' Camp) for our Pesach program. To ensure that the *chametz* was not brought into the hotel proper, I set it up in a wing which was down a long corridor and stood guard there to remind everyone not to bring anything back with them."

Agudah Convention and 5th Siyum HaShas of Daf Yomi

One of the most unforgettable gatherings at Zucker's was the Zeirei Agudas Yisroel Convention and 5th Siyum HaShas of Daf Yomi held

in the beginning of September, 1960. The guests included the members of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah, including Hagaonim Harav Aharon Kotler (who came on Sunday and said the *hadran*), Harav Eliezer Silver, Harav Moshe Feinstein, Harav Yaakov Kamenetsky, Harav Yaakov Ruderman, *zecher tzaddikim livrachah*, and many lay leaders of the Agudah.

“It’s interesting to note that the hotel only had 100 rooms, so the maximum in attendance was 200 guests for that weekend. Fifteen years later, there were thousands of people at the *Siyum HaShas*, and then there were tens of thousands, many of them who now learn *Daf Yomi* every day,”



The Skulener Rebbe walking at Zucker’s Hotel.

Reb Baruch observed. “One of the few artifacts that I still have from the hotel, which has since burned down, is the program for that convention, which was printed on plain paper.”

Rabbi Moshe Yanofsky recalled an incredible incident that he witnessed on Motzoei Shabbos of the convention, long after the keynote session of the *melaveh malkah* ended. “I was in charge of the kitchen, and after we finished cleaning up, I was ready to retire for a few hours sleep before breakfast had to be prepared. It was around 4 a.m., and I saw Harav Leizer Silver sitting on the porch. I approached him and asked if I could get the Rav anything, and he responded that he was waiting for the arrival of the Skulener Rebbe, *zy”a*.

“The Rebbe had just arrived from Romania, and since the Agudah was intimately involved in arranging his release, he wanted to attend the Agudah Convention to express his *hakaras hatov*. He was not able to make it for Shabbos, but he notified the Agudah that he would be coming on Motzoei Shabbos. Harav Silver told me, ‘How can it be that the Rebbe is coming and no one is here to greet him? So, I am waiting for him to come to give him a proper welcome.’ I sat and spoke with Harav Silver until the Rebbe arrived, and Harav Silver escorted him to his room and then disappeared.

“Since it was now around 5 a.m., I decided that it did not pay to go to sleep, and I headed to the kitchen to prepare breakfast. I heard a voice in the *beis medrash*, and I peeked in and saw Harav Silver engrossed in learning at that hour. Keep in mind that he was 80 years old at the time.”



Top: Harav Avigdor Miller with participants in his Yarchei Kallah at Zucker’s Hotel in the early 1970s. Bottom: Harav Miller on a nature walk describing the *nifleos haBorei*.

Yarchei Kallah with Harav Avigdor Miller

In the summer of 1973, Harav Avigdor Miller arranged a *yarchei kallah* for participants over the Labor Day Weekend, when the hotels were emptying and the prices were cheaper. “I remember Harav Miller taking a nature walk with the people after *Shacharis* and pointing out the *nifleos haBorei*. *Shiurim* on various levels were given, and I observed as he moved from one to the next and interacted with each group on their own level.”

The End

In 1980, the dining room building burned down, and on Shavuos 5773/2013, a fire engulfed the main building and burned for 18 hours, bringing an end to 60 years of memorable vacations at Zucker’s Glen Wild Hotel. ■

AGUDAH CONVENTION	
8:00 A.M.	Shacharis
9:00 A.M.	Breakfast
10:00 A.M.	Working Session & Pirshoi Seajim
Participants: Moshelem Pessels, Joseph's Rose, Mel' Zion, Rabbi F. Shtandoweb, Aris Dohi	
10:30 A.M.	Chazronai: Shmuel Biren
OFFICIAL APPOINTMENT	
1:00 P.M.	Dinner
Deafert Spikane: Rabbi Aaron Solter, Elischer Bone, Hapertine, Chairman of Shetebol Editorial Mission	
3:00 P.M.	MEZUSIM
Chairman: Rabbi Gabriel Beer	
7:00 P.M.	Shema and Distribution of Shema
Shofar: Rabbi Aaron Grier	
Dagger	
Installation of Officers: Rabbi Yoche Shorer, Executive Vice President of Agudath Israel of America	
Chairman: Mr. Julius Kingon	
OFFICE	
8:00 A.M.	Shacharis
9:00 A.M.	Breakfast
10:30 A.M.	Executive Board Meeting
10:30 P.M.	Glavine Shemim
	Lunch

Program for the Agudah Convention and 5th *Siyum Hashas* of *Daf Yomi*, September, 1960.