



### Jewish Symbols 24/7 The Counting of the Omer & Lag B'Omer

An **Omer** is a measure of barley. In Biblical times, on the second day of Passover, it was a mitzvah to bring barley the size of an Omer to the Temple in Jerusalem as an offering. Then fifty days later, on Shavuot, it was a mitzvah to bring the first offering of the new wheat harvest. There are seven weeks (49 days) between the second day of Passover (when the omer was offered in the Temple) and Shavuot (the wheat harvest). The period of these seven weeks is called the Counting of the Omer (Sefirat HaOmer). The reason for Counting the Omer is because it is written in the Torah to count the days between Passover's second day and Shavuot. (Lev. 23:15-21) The counting of the Omer is considered a period of mourning. Many people follow the tradition of not allowing weddings, festivities, music, dancing and haircuts during this time.

The Torah itself does not give us a reason for why we **should** Count the Omer. Rabbis have provided us with different explanations for this commandment. 1) In the Bible, Shavuot was an agricultural festival. It is said to count the time from the second day of Passover when an offering of the omer (sheaf of wheat) was given until the time of the wheat harvest when an offering of the new grain is brought to the Temple. 2) There is no fixed calendar date for celebrating Shavuot. Shavuot is defined as the day of celebration after the completion of the Omer Count. The Count tells us when to celebrate Shavuot. 3) The Omer Count links Passover and Shavuot. While Passover commemorates the liberation from slavery, the Israelites were not truly free until they received the rules and laws of the Torah and agreed to follow them. We were given freedom on Passover, and we were given the purpose of our freedom on Shavuot.

**Lag B'Omer** is the 33rd day of the counting of the *Omer*. Lag or lamed and gimel in Hebrew means 33. *Lag B'Omer* is characterized by a day of outings. In Israel and throughout the Diaspora, the day is celebrated with picnics, ballgames, and bow-and-arrow play. It is also customary to light bonfires and sing and dance around them. Many Jews congregate at Meron, in Israel, the burial place of Rabbi Shimon *bar* Yochai, and his son, Rabbi Elazar *b'Rebbi* Shimon, where the day is celebrated with bonfires and songs. Lag B'Omer is a semi-holiday, an interruption in the Counting of the Omer period of mourning. Weddings, festivities, music, dancing and haircuts are allowed. Many parents wait until their son is three to cut his hair, and on *Lag B'Omer* they cut his hair for the first time. **Lag B'Omer is Friday May 23, 2008 or Iyar 18, 5768 CELEBRATE!!!**

#### Multi-Intelligence Integration Ideas

- ★ An *Omer* is equal to about 3.64 litres. Have some liter measures available for the children to scoop and see how much. You can use different kinds such as soda bottles, measuring cups and a scale to weigh the amounts. If possible, bring in some barley and use that to measure.
- ★ Cook using barley you can just boil it and season it, or make some soup or stew.
- ★ The class can build a Temple structure and dress up as the Israelites at the time. They can bring offerings of barley and dance and sing as in Temple times.
- ★ In Israel the bow and arrow are symbols of Lag B'Omer. The children can use toy ones to practice their skills. Or draw a bulls-eye on the ground or as a target, and let the children throw beanbags or wet sponges at it.
- ★ Plan to spend Lag B'Omer outside with relay races, dancing, picnics and telling stories about Jewish heroes. If possible, have a fire and cook potatoes (a favorite in Israel). Plant a garden of wheat and barley.

#### HEBREW VOCABULARY

חֵטָה /CHI-TAH/WHEAT

שְׂעוּרָה /SE-O-RAH/BARLEY

קֶשֶׁת /KE-SHET/BOW

חֵץ /CHATZ/ARROW

*The Symbol: the outward expression of the inward signification—  
 should above all charm the senses by and for itself. Heine*

For further information:

Susan Remick Topek - Director, SAJES Early Childhood & Library Services  
 777 Larkfield Road / Commack, NY 11725 / 631-462-8600  
 srtopek@sajes.org/ [www.sajes.org](http://www.sajes.org)

A beneficiary agency of  
**UJA Federation**  
 of New York