Darshan Yeshiva

# The Omer

## Watch overview videos:

1. What is The Omer (3:49)
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sl7Ui8c-Rqs
2. Spiritual practice of counting the omer
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVSUN6PRKRk
   a. Note the end of the video becomes a promotion for a specific group's offering for counting of the omer, which is not the intent of having you watch this video.

## Basics:

**Pronunciation:** OH-mer (♫ not available)
**Meaning:** measure, sheaf, or bundle
**Jewish Date:** 16th Nisan-5th of Sivan -- 2nd night of Passover to Erev Shavuot
**Secular Date:** Generally falls late-March through May
**Length:** 49 Days
**Themes:** sephirot

## Overview & History:

Read: http://bit.ly/1ggSXuX

49 Day period that begins on the 2nd night of Passover and ends on the Erev Shavuot
It is the time of purification and growth between leaving Mitzrayim and receiving the revelation at Sinai on Shavuot.
Began as time to begin the harvest season in Ancient Israel, beginning with the barley harvest and culminating with the beginning of the wheat harvest, where daily offerings (omer) of barley were brought to the temple
Current practices range from simply saying a blessing and the number of days of the omer each day, to deep mystical spiritual work associated with this period of time.
Seen as a time of mourning for more Orthodox communities
Lag B'Omer, 33rd day of Omer, is a celebratory holiday akin to May Day in many other cultures. Traditional restrictions for the Omer are removed for this day.

## Customs & Halakhah

Halakah below is based on Orthodox tradition, as that is the denomination with the greatest concern for strictly following halakhah, and as balanced for Ashkenazic vs. Sephardic custom as possible.

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## Omer Period

Read: http://bit.ly/15Q20B0

Ritual is generally done at night, at change of Jewish day (sunset)
More Orthodox communities have custom to not work at night, from sunset to dawn, during the Omer
In Sephardic communities, specifically it is women who are not to work at night during the Omer period
Traditionally observed as a period of communal mourning, which means the following are prohibited for the Orthodox

b. No weddings
c. No instrumental music (live or recorded), vocal music is permitted
d. No haircuts or shaving, unless for business

## Lag B'Omer

Read: http://bit.ly/1e2wWy1

33rd day of the Omer
Lag B'Omer is a minor Jewish holiday falling on the eighteenth day of Iyar, the thirty-third day of the Omer. The festival celebrates mystical revelation, marks the death of the mystic Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, and also remembers the first fall of manna. It is often celebrated with bonfires and archery. (Telshemesh.org)
Restrictions of Omer period are relaxed on this day, so many get haircuts, play instrumental music, and celebrate weddings.
Archery: connected to the midrash around rainbows only being necessary until the time of the Messiah. The word for rainbow and archery bow (keshet) is the same.
Bonfire parties are common part of Lag B'omer celebrations
Eating Carob: remembers the food that it is said saved the life of the ancient sage Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (http://bit.ly/1huK8vj).

## Liturgy

### Traditional: Five steps to counting omer

Read: http://bit.ly/1bMzEXr

1. Meditation before counting
2. Blessing
3. Recite count
4. Read Psalm 67
5. Closing Prayer

### Omer Calendars

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Read: http://bit.ly/GFVZeP

Many different "Omer Calendars" have been created to help individuals find spiritual growth during this time. Here are several to help you explore:

Chabad Spiritual Guide to Counting the Omer: http://bit.ly/GCQWeW
Egalitarian Omer Calendar: http://bit.ly/GGr1CA
Ketzirah's Workbook: http://bit.ly/16MS8sq
Omer Calendar of Biblical Women: http://bit.ly/15UkHOJ
The "Homer" Calendar (parody): http://bit.ly/16MSGP0

### Lag B'Omer

There is no traditional liturgy associated with Lag B'Omer, so below are modern rituals that have been developed.

Lag B'Omer Four Worlds/Five Souls Ritual: http://bit.ly/16MTpjm
Between the Fires: http://bit.ly/1fSVBt7
See "customs" for more ideas on how to celebrate.

## Sources and Bibliography

## Books:


- The Jewish Holidays: A Guide & Commentary, Michael Strassfield
- Seasons of our Joy, Arthur Ocean Waskow
- The Jewish Book of Days, Jill Hammer
- The Rosh Chodesh Table: Foods at the New Moon, Judith Solomon
- Seasons for Celebration, Karen L. Fox and Phyllis Zimbler Miller
- Celebrating the Jewish Year: The Spring and Summer Holidays: Passover, Shavuot, The Omer, Tisha B'Av; Rabbi Paul Steinberg and Janet Greenstein Potter
- Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols, Ellen Frankel and Betsy Patkin Teutsch


## Websites:


- http://www.academia.edu/3312940/Bring_in_the_Sheaves_Counting_the_Omer_toward_inner_growth
- http://www.jewfaq.org/holidayb.htm
- http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/42944/jewish/Lag-BaOmer.htm
- http://www.torah.org/learning/yomtov/omer/
- http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Shavuot/In_the_Community/Counting_the_Omer.shtml?p=1


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- http://theshiksa.com/what-is-lag-bomer/
- http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/679431/jewish/Customs-Traditions.htm
- http://telshemesh.org/iyar/lag_bomer_and_the_maypole.html
- http://www.ou.org/chagim/sefira/mystery.htm
- http://telshemesh.org/iyar/lag_bomer_four_worldsfive_souls_ritual.html
- http://www.reformjudaism.org/jewish-holidays/lag-baomer

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