

On May 3rd, *LAG B'OMER* appears on our calendar, a minor observance, even in traditional Judaism. But we teach it, because it's part of our religion and history.

What is the "OMER"? Between Passover and Shavuot there are seven weeks. During that time is the "OMER", or season of counting the barley harvest. How did the people in ancient Israel live? What did they do to earn a living? Their work was agriculture; they grew their food. For seven weeks they watched and prayed for rain for crops—no parties, or holidays. Probably everyone was too busy watering and weeding the grain, so there would be enough food for the year. Even today, traditional Jews do not get married between Passover and Shavuot.

How about LAG? Lag is really not a word—it's a number. Hebrew letters are also numbers: *Aleph* =1; *Bet* = 2; and *Gimel* =3; *Lamed* = 30; so, 3 + 30= 33. LAG is the 33rd day of the counting, and it became a little break in the 49 days.

How did LAG B'OMER start? Rabbi Akiva, the great and famous rabbi from the 1st century CE, had hundreds of students. Unfortunately, a terrible plague broke out, and many of them died. On the 33rd day of the Omer the plague

How is LAG B'OMER celebrated today? There are no special prayers or Bible and Torah readings for this minor holiday. Nothing is done at home, and only a little in Israel, but Reform Jews still like to know about it.

1. In Israel and among traditional Jews, many weddings take place, since this is the only time in seven weeks that weddings and big parties can occur.

2. LAG B'OMER is often a time of picnics to remember Rabbi Simeon.

3. In ancient Israel the children dressed as hunters and took bows and arrows to fool the Romans into thinking they were going hunting, not studying with Rabbi Simeon. That's why you'll see a bow and arrow as part of LAG B'OMER. We remember the courage of Jewish soldiers who fought the Romans under *Bar Kochba* at *Masada*. They still light bonfires to recall military victories over Romans.

4. LAG B'OMER, remembering two 2 great rabbis of long ago, has become YOM MOREH, Teacher Appreciation Day, when we say thanks to Hebrew and religious school teachers for their hard work.

Its message is to honor our scholars, remember our history, appreciate harvest rains and a good crop, and take time to