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LAG BAOMER

Lag BaOmer ([Hebrew](#): ל"ג בעומר), also **Lag B'Omer**, is a [Jewish religious](#) holiday celebrated on the 33rd day of the [Counting of the Omer](#), which occurs on the 18th day of the [Hebrew month](#) of [Iyar](#).

According to [kabbalistic](#) tradition, this day marks the [hillula](#) (celebration, interpreted by some as anniversary of the death) of Rabbi [Shimon bar Yochai](#), "the Rashbi", a [Mishnaic](#) sage and leading disciple of [Rabbi Akiva](#) in the 2nd century, and the day on which he revealed the deepest secrets of [kabbalah](#) in the form of the [Zohar](#) (Book of Splendor, literally 'radiance'), a

landmark text of [Jewish mysticism](#). This association has spawned several well-known customs and practices on Lag BaOmer, including the lighting of [bonfires](#), pilgrimages to the [tomb of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai](#) in the northern Israeli town of [Meron](#), and various customs at the tomb itself. However, the association of Lag BaOmer with the death of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai may be based on a printer's error.^[2]

Another tradition that makes Lag BaOmer a day of Jewish celebration identifies it as the day on which the plague that killed [Rabbi Akiva](#)'s 24,000

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disciples came to an end, and for this reason the mourning period of [Sefirat HaOmer](#) concludes on Lag BaOmer for some believers.^[3]

ORIGINS

The origins of Lag BaOmer as a minor festival are unclear. The earliest clear reference to the observance of Lag BaOmer is a brief statement by [Isaac ben Dorbolo](#) (12th century, northern France). It is found in his annotations to [Mahzor Vitry](#). He points out that [Purim](#) and Lag BaOmer always fall on the same day of the week, but he says nothing about the origin of the holiday.^[4] Lag BaOmer is also

mentioned in the early 13th century by [Avraham ben Nathan](#) in his [Sefer HaManhig](#).^[5] The Talmudist [Menachem Meiri](#) in his gloss to [Yevamot](#) 62b cites the Talmudic passage which states that during the time of Rabbi Akiva, 24,000 of his students died from a divinely-sent plague during the counting of the Omer. The Talmud goes on to say that this was because they did not

show proper respect to one another. Meiri named Lag BaOmer as the day when, "according to a tradition of the [geonim](#)", the "plague" ended.^[6]

According to Jewish religious tradition, after the death of Rabbi Akiva's 24,000 students, he was left with only five students, among them Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. The latter went on to become the greatest teacher of [Torah](#) in his generation, and is purported to have authored

the *Zohar*, a landmark text of Jewish mysticism. The actual authorship of the *Zohar* has been disputed, and scholarship generally points to [Moses de León](#) as the author of the *Zohar*, [pseudepigraphically](#) attributed to Bar Yochai by him in an attempt to legitimize the work.^[10]

The *Zohar* calls the day of Bar Yochai's death a *hillula*.^[9] Rabbi [Chaim Vital](#), the main disciple of Rabbi [Isaac Luria](#) and author of [Etz Chaim](#), was the first to name Lag

BaOmer as the date of Bar Yochai's *hillula*.^[9] According to the *Zohar* (III, 287b–296b), on the day of Bar Yochai's death, he revealed the deepest secrets of the Kabbalah.^[11] Lag BaOmer therefore became a day of celebration of the great light (i.e., wisdom) that Bar Yochai brought into the world.^[12]

[Nachman Krochmal](#), a 19th-century Jewish theologian, among others, suggests that the deaths of Rabbi Akiva's students was a veiled reference to the defeat of "Akiva's soldiers" by the

Romans, and that Lag BaOmer was the day on which Bar Kokhba enjoyed a brief victory.^[9]

During the Middle Ages, Lag BaOmer became a special holiday for rabbinical students and was called "Scholar's Day". It was customary to rejoice on this day through outdoor sports