Lag BaOmer: The 33rd Day of the Omer

I. Learning

A. From the second night of Pesach until the holiday of Shavuot we count 49 days of the Omer. The Torah tells us to count seven weeks of seven days, which equals 49 days. Every night after the evening tefillah we count how many days of the Omer it is: today is the first day of the Omer, today is the eighth day of the Omer which is one week and one day, and so forth. The night of Shavuot is the completion, which is 50 days.

B. These days are typically seen as days of mourning - sad days during which we do not celebrate. People do not get married, have parties, listen to music, cut their hair, or show other signs of simcha. There are different customs as to which days have these minhagim, but at least 33 days are kept as days of mourning. Some people start these days after the month of Nisan ends (the month when Pesach occurs), plus the second day of Rosh Chodesh Iyar, Pesach Sheni, Lag Ba-Omer, and from Rosh Chodesh Sivan until Shavuot. The total remaining days of the Omer equal 33 days. Others end the days of mourning on the 33rd day of the Omer (Lag Ba-Omer). Still others observe the entire Omer period as a time of mourning.

C. The numerical value of Lag is 33: the lamed equals 30 and the gimel equals 3. Therefore the 33rd day of the Omer, which is the 18th day of the Month of Iyar, is called Lag BaOmer.

D. It is tradition that the students of the famous Rabbi Akiva died from a plague during the days between Pesach and Shavuot. Rabbi Akiva was a great rabbi who only started learning Torah when he was 40 years old. He gathered hundreds and thousands of students and was very loved by them all. His most important teaching was to love your friend as you would want to be loved yourself and to treat other people as you yourself would want to be treated: Veahavtah le-rayecha kamocha. Unfortunately, his students fought with each other and were jealous of each other. Because of this Hashem brought a plague and killed most of
his students. On Lag BaOmer, the students of Rabbi Akiva stopped dying and this became a
day of celebration throughout the Jewish people.

E. There is another reason that we celebrate Lag BaOmer. During the days of Roman rule
in Israel the Jews were not allowed to study Torah and to perform the mitzvot. One of
Rabbi Akiva’s students, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, did not want to give up his Torah
study. He ran to Meron in Northern Israel and hid with his son in a cave. Hashem caused a
well of water and a carob tree to grow in the cave so that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his
son Rabbi Elazar would have food and water while they were in hiding. After 12 years we
learn that Eliyahu Hanavi came to them and told them that it was safe to come out of their
hiding. When they left the cave, they saw the Jews working as farmers and questioned if
they were keeping the mitzvot. Hashem punished them and made them return to the cave
for another 12 months. After that they left the cave again, but this time saw that the Jews
were keeping Shabbat. The midrash tells us that Hashem showed the two rabbis a rainbow
as a sign that it was now safe for them to remain outside of their hiding place and return to
observant Jewish life. Many years later it is said that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai died on Lag
BaOmer and instructed his disciples to celebrate that day as a day of joy.

F. Today Lag BaOmer is a day of celebration. The mourning that we observe during the rest
of the Omer is stopped and people are allowed to marry and have parties. You can listen to
music and get haircuts (Sephardic Jews wait until the next day to get haircuts). There are
people who have the minhag to wait to cut their son’s hair for the first time until they are
three years old or on their son’s third Lag BaOmer if the 3rd birthday falls during the Omer.
Many travel to Meron to the grave of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and perform the haircut
there.

G. There is also a custom of some Sephardic Jews to color eggs on Lag BaOmer to
remember the rainbow that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai saw when he left the cave.

H. Throughout Israel (and other places) bonfires are lit to celebrate the holiday. Children
play with bows and arrows. They do this to remember the rainbow. The children also play
with bows because when the Jews were secretly learning Torah, they needed to hide this
from the Romans. Whenever the Roman soldiers would come they would take out their
bows and arrows and pretend to be hunting.
II. **Craft and Edible Project Projects:**

A. Edible Rainbow:

Cut strawberries
Orange segments
Pineapple wedges
Cut kiwi
Blueberries
Purple grapes

On a plate, form an arc with the cut strawberries. Under the arc of strawberries, add an arc of the orange segments. Continue with an arc of pineapple, cut kiwis, blueberries, and finally the grapes.

B. Dyed Eggs to Remember the Rainbow that Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai saw when he left the cave
Ingredients:
Vinegar
Water at room temperature
Food coloring
Hard boiled eggs.

In a coffee cup, mix together a 1/2 cup of water at room temperature, 1 tablespoon of vinegar, and several drops of food coloring. I used about 20 drops of each color, but you can adjust this however you like. Prepare several different colors in this manner.

Carefully place one egg in each cup of food coloring. Watch the eggs carefully and remove them when they reach the desired shade. Use a spoon to remove the egg and place it in an egg holder or on a paper towel to dry.

Page Break

C. Edible Bonfire
Ingredients: pretzel sticks, candy corn, cheerios, marshmallows.

Fire: Take 2 thick pretzel sticks and form a triangle (one leg is shorter for the base)

Fill the inside of the triangle with thin pretzel sticks and candy corn. Line the plate with marshmallows and cheerios if desired.

D. Non-Edible Bonfire

Materials:
Brown, yellow, red and orange construction paper
Large white or black construction paper
Glue
Scissors

Preparation:
1. Cut the colorful construction paper into small squares. The smaller the squares are, the better the final product will look.

2. Draw a picture of a bonfire as a guide on the larger construction paper. This will be covered later, so it doesn't have to be perfect.

3. If you're using black construction paper, use white chalk or a white colored pencil.

4. Glue the colorful squares on the paper on the drawing, using yellow, orange and red mosaic pieces to make the flames and brown for the logs.

5. You can add the sun using yellow mosaic pieces if you're using white paper, or put in a moon and stars if