



# A HOLIDAY FOR ARI ANT

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*Ari Any loves Jewish holidays – but he's never heard of Lag B'Omer. What is it about? And is it any fun for ants?*

## JEWISH CONCEPTS

Lag B'Omer is a joyful Jewish holiday that takes place in the springtime. The meaning of “Lag” is “thirty-three,” derived from *gematria*, a system of associating each Hebrew letter with a number. “B'Omer” means “of the Omer,” the Omer being the forty-nine day period between Passover and Shavuot. Thus, Lag B'Omer is the thirty-third day of this period.

The great Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who lived in the 2nd century, is said to have passed away on Lag B'Omer. However, far from being a day of mourning, it has been established as one of joy and celebration in his honor. Before he died, the rabbi revealed many secret teachings to his students, and some say that, as a result, the place where they studied was filled with intense light – hence the tradition of lighting bonfires on this holiday. To this day, thousands of people gather on Lag B'Omer at Meron in Israel, the site of his burial, to celebrate the rabbi's life and teachings with song and dance.

Lag B'Omer is also connected with the 2nd century because of a plague that swept through the land of Israel and primarily affected the many students of the celebrated and much-loved Rabbi Akiva. Because of this plague, the seven-week period of the Omer is considered one of semi-mourning. The illness was said to have ceased on Lag B'Omer, providing yet another reason to celebrate on this day.

## USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

In addition to the traditional gathering at Meron, Lag B'Omer is celebrated in many ways both in Israel and abroad. As it is a day of release from the mourning period, weddings and other joyful events are often held on this day. Jewish communities put on carnivals with games, food, and fun for all. Schoolchildren and families go on hikes and picnics and enjoy bonfires, as in *A Holiday for Ari Ant*.

Here are some ways your family can enjoy Lag B'Omer together:

- If you have a safe space in which to do so, hold a bonfire party, inviting friends and neighbors to join you. Provide roast-able treats, such as marshmallows and potatoes, to enjoy by the fire. Encourage everyone to suggest a favorite song to sing together, and feel free to dance!
- Go on a family picnic to a nearby park. Get everyone involved in choosing what foods to take and packing up the picnic basket. If possible, choose a place that you can hike to, enjoying the outdoors. Following the meal, give everyone an opportunity to share a favorite story, and consider sharing a story about Lag B'Omer!