What is Lag laOmer?

16th of Iyar, 5770 (31 days of Omer. 4 weeks, 3 days)

33 of Omer

Lag BaOmer (for Sephardic Jews is more accurate to say: “Lag laOmer”) means the 33rd day of the count of the Omer. The restrictions of mourning are lifted on this day and weddings, parties, etc are permitted from this day on.
This year it will fall this coming Saturday night/Sunday.
During the time of Rabbi Akiba (approx. 150 of the Common Era) 24,000 of his students died from a divine-sent plague during these days of the Omer. The Talmud says that this was because they did not show proper respect to one another. The 33rd day of the Omer this plague ended. Another interpretation is that the students fell as they participated in Bar Kokhba’s revolt against the Romans (Rabbi Akiba was known for his support of bar Kokhba’s revolt).
Some of rabbi Akiva students survived, among them Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai who became one of greatest teacher of Torah in his generation and who is mostly known for authored the Sefer haZohar, “The book of splendor” the main book of Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism).

According to tradition, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai passed away on the 33rd day of the Omer. Lag laOmer is known among Sepharadic Jews as the Hillulah (wedding) De Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Very briefly: During his lifetime –which included 12 years of isolation- Rabbi Shimon achieved the highest possible level of human attachment to God. The rabbis of the Kabbala called this level metaphorically “engagement” (Irusin) which is when a Jew is totally, passionately and exclusively dedicated to God. If during his lifetime, the Rabbis of the Kabbalah explain, one has achieved this superior level, then his departed soul will be “married” (I insist: metaphorically), in other words, intimately connected to the Ziv haShekhina (the Almighty’s Splendorous Presence).