



The Rhythm of the Journey – An Omer Playlist

Topic The Rhythm of the Journey – An Omer Playlist

Grade Level(s) 6th-12th

Goals for the Lesson/Activity

Students will:

- Learn about the values associated with counting the omer
- Discover the minor and modern holidays between Passover and Shavuot
- Explore the emotions of the spiritual journey and holidays between Passover and Shavuot
- Create a playlist for the period between Passover and Shavuot

Materials needed

- Omer counting chart found here: <http://pjvoice.org/2015/05/11/49-days-of-jewish-spiritual-practice/#.XKyed6ROnIU> or <https://aleph.org/resources/omer-poster-colorful-omer-counting-chart>
- A Hebrew calendar or copies of the pages of a Jewish calendar inclusive of Passover and Shavuot

Technology needed

- Access to tablets, computers, or phones to search for music and create a playlist
- Device to show videos

Prepare in Advance

- Print out and make copies of calendars and calendar pages
- Familiarize yourself with a music sharing app such as Apple Music, Spotify, or YouTube music

Background for Teachers

Counting the Omer

The tradition of counting the omer comes from the book of Leviticus (23:15-16) which says:

הַרְתָּ הַשֶּׁבֶת מִיּוֹם הַבִּיאָתְךָ אֶת-עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה שִׁבְעַת שָׁבָתוֹת וְסַפַּרְתָּם לָכֶם מִן הַיּוֹם
תְּמִיחַת תְּהֵינָה:

And from the day on which you bring the sheaf of elevation offering—the day after the sabbath—you shall count off seven weeks. They must be complete:



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עַד מִסְחֶרֶת הַשָּׁבֹּת הַשְּׁבִיעִת תִּסְפְּרוּ חֲמִשִּׁים יוֹם וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם מִנְחָה חֲדָשָׁה
לַיהוָה:

you must count until the day after the seventh week—fifty days; then you shall bring an offering of new grain to the YHVH.

The omer referred to in the text is a unit of measure. We also learn in Leviticus (23:9-11) that one was not allowed to utilize the new barley crop until one brought an omer of barley to the Temple as an offering. As a result, when the Temple was still standing, people would bring an omer of grain on the second day of Passover. The offering itself began to be known as the omer.

Counting the omer is a way of marking time between Passover and Shavuot. Every evening Jews announce the “count” of the omer in a specific way: Today is the x day of the omer, or, after the first week (for example), “today is 17 days, which is two weeks and three days of the omer.” The ritual begins with a meditation which suggests that the person is ready to perform this mitzvah, followed by the blessing for counting, the count, recitation of Psalm 67 (which, without its introduction, has 49 words), ending with a prayer for people in captivity.

In addition to marking time, some use the omer period as a spiritual preparation for Shavuot and the remembrance of receiving the Torah. Each week, people focus on a new value as follows. The translations here reflect a Kabbalistic understanding:

- *Hesed* – lovingkindness
- *Gevurah* – discipline
- *Tiferet* – compassion
- *Netzach* – endurance
- *Hod* – humility
- *Yesod* – bonding
- *Malchut* – sovereignty, leadership

In addition to each week having a theme, each day in the week has an additional theme. The first day of the first week is *hesed she'b'hesed* (lovingkindness in lovingkindness) the second day is *gevurah she'b'hesed*, the third is *tiferet she'b'hesed* and so on. A chart available for download can be found in the “materials needed” section of this lesson.

Rosh Hodesh

The new moon or new month. This is a minor holiday whose main observances are liturgical. The new month is announced on the Shabbat prior to its first day. On the day itself, an extra paragraph marking the occasion is added to the *Amidah* and *Birkat Hamazon* (grace after meals) and *Musaf*



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(an additional service) is recited after morning prayers. In addition, a portion of the Torah regarding Rosh Hodesh is read and an abbreviated *Hallel* is recited.

Lag B'Omer

In the Hebrew system in which letters have numerical value, the letters *lamed* and *gimmel* taken together have the numerical value of 33. Lag B'Omer, a minor festival, is the 33rd day of the counting of the omer. The Talmud teaches that a plague killed thousands of Rabbi Akiva's students at this time many years ago as a result of their disrespect of one another. In memory of the people who lost their lives, the omer is observed as a period of semi-mourning; weddings are not held, and some Jews refrain from cutting their hair. Tradition suggests that the plague ended on the 33rd day of the omer. Accordingly, this day has turned into one of celebration; weddings are often held on this day and, in Israel, people have picnics and light bonfires.

Yom Hashoah

Yom Hashoah is Holocaust Remembrance Day. The full name of the holiday is Yom Hashoah V'hagevurah—Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust and Heroism. It falls on the 27th day of the Hebrew month of Nisan, a week after the end of Passover in Israeli observance. Though both the date and the name were codified by the Israeli Knesset, the day is observed worldwide. In Israel, a siren is sounded throughout the country signaling moments of silence. Throughout the world ceremonies are held to remember both the victims and the heroes of this terrible period in world history.

Yom Hazikaron

Literally "Remembrance Day," this commemoration occurs on the 4th of the Hebrew month of Iyar, the day preceding Independence Day. The day is meant to honor Israeli soldiers who died in conflict as well as civilians killed in acts of terror. The day is marked by two main features, two-minute sirens at 8:00 PM and 11:00 AM in which the entire country comes to a halt, and memorial prayer services at the country's military cemeteries and public squares. Additionally, many schools have programs to remember alumni who died in combat. Theaters and many other entertainment venues are closed.

Yom Ha'atzma'ut

Israel's Independence Day is marked on the 5th of Iyar, the anniversary of the date on which independence was declared in 1948. In contrast to Yom Hazikaron, this day is filled with lively celebration. The holiday begins with a speech given by the president followed by a small parade featuring all branches of the Israeli armed forces. Many cities hold festivals featuring Israeli culture and there are often spontaneous parties and dancing in the streets. During the day families go on picnics and hikes and partake in other relaxing activities.



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Description of Activities

Teach students about the omer. Use the information above or show them the following short video from www.bimbam.com: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=gIKn66S26n0>

Ask:

- Why might it be difficult to remember to count the omer?
- What do you think could be done to help someone remember?

If students don't include these in their answers, mention the following:

- People set reminders or alarms on their phones
- There are omer counting apps
- There are physical omer reminders, usually made of wood that people keep on countertops in rooms they're in most often, like the kitchen
- People use omer calendars.

Let students know that, in addition to simply counting the omer, some people use the period between Passover and Shavuot as a time for spiritual growth. Tell students about the seven kabbalistic values associated with the omer period, writing each with its definition on the black/white board, and hand out the calendar here: <http://pivoice.org/2015/05/11/49-days-of-jewish-spiritual-practice/#.XKyed6ROnIU> or <https://aleph.org/resources/omer-poster-colorful-omer-counting-chart>

- *Hesed* – lovingkindness
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Let students know that you'd like to create a playlist for the omer journey to motivate people to count and to engage spiritually. With students, brainstorm one or two songs for each category listed above.

Let them know that before they can create a full playlist, they need to know about a few more observances that happen in this time period.



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Hand out copied pages from a current Jewish calendar, inclusive of Passover and Shavuot. Invite them to look at the calendar pages and share the names of the additional observances they find. These are: Shabbat, Rosh Hodesh, Lag B'Omer, Yom HaShoah, Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzma'ut. As the students name them, write them on the black/white board and give a simple definition for each.

Optional: Brainstorm one or two songs for Shabbat or one of the holidays as an example or suggest songs to get their minds going. Examples include:

- Shabbat: L'cha Dodi, Bim Bam/Shabbat Shalom, Feeling Groovy, Hallelujah
- Rosh Hodesh: Moonshadow, Major Tom
- Lag B'Omer: Hava Nagila, Nigun Atik
- Yom Hashoah: Eli Eli, Zog Nit Keyn Mol, Soundtrack to Schindler's List, Chai
- Yom HaZikaron: War. Al Kol Eileh, Fix You, One Day
- Yom Ha'atzma'ut: Hatikvah, The Hope, Am Yisrael Chai

Split students into seven groups. Distribute a calendar to each group. Assign each group one week of the omer. Their task is to find one thematic song for each day. The songs don't need to have the words (discipline, compassion, etc.) in them or have a direct connection to the holiday; they can be songs that express the emotion or essence of the day. Have students put their suggestions into a shared playlist app of your or their choice.

Share the finished playlist with all students. Consider posting it in a synagogue or organization.

Differentiation Options

Knowing that students learn in a variety of ways and modalities, the following options are provided to adjust the above lesson to meet the unique needs of your learners.

For learners who need more assistance

- Give students one holiday or one Kabbalistic category
- Have students listen to a series of pre-chosen songs, using the lists for holidays above, and choose among them.

For learners who need extension opportunities

- Have students find readings to accompany each day
- Ask students to compile a play list for the entire calendar year