

Maqam of the Week

Spring 2009 - Book of Leviticus

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The Sephardic Pizmonim Project (www.pizmonim.com) is happy to explain why and when some of the maqamat will be used throughout the Spring 2009 season—specifically during the 10 *parashahs* (weekly Torah portions) of the Book of Leviticus (Sefer Vayikra).

Some background information: The Middle Eastern Sephardic Jewish community has a unique tradition of using a different *maqam* (Arabic: melody type) each Shabbat for the *shaharit* (morning) prayer services. The melodies used in a given maqam aim effectively to express the mood throughout the prayers. The maqam that will be used is based on the theme of the *parashah*. The 10 main maqamat generally used are: *Rast, Mahour, Ajam, Nahwand, Saba, Sigah, Bayat, Hoseni, Rahawi/Nawah* and *Hijaz*. The maqamat have different melodies and have different reasons as to why they are used.

In making the decision of which maqams to use for the weeks of Sefer Vayikra, one must consider two factors. First, unlike 2008, a leap year, when all the parashah portions of Vayikra were read separately, in 2009, not a leap year, we will be combining Tazria with Metzora, Aharei Mot with Kedoshim, and Behar with Behukotai. Also, it is important to take into consideration that the holidays that occur during this time frame play a role in determining which maqam to use for the Shabbat prior to the holiday (Passover, Israel's Independence Day, Lag La'Omer, Jerusalem Day and Shavuot). Due to these factors, we have attempted to provide you with multiple sources of which maqam to use according to Gabriel A. Shrem (as per the Red Pizmonim



Book), Hakham Moshe Ashear (as per his notes from 1936-1940) or other sources (de-facto community practices). We have also attempted to simplify these complicated scenarios as much as possible.

On **Shabbat Vayikra**, Maqam Rast is applied according to all sources, because we are beginning the new Humash, and Rast is applied for all beginnings.

On **Shabbat Tzav**, which is **Shabbat HaGadol** (Shabbat prior to Passover), Maqam Rahawi-Nawah is applied because the Haggadah of Passover is conducted in Maqam Rahawi. In addition to that, the Passover pizmon "Emonim Irkho Shebah" (page 359) is traditionally applied to "Semehim Besetam." Most congregations throughout the community have the custom of mixing Maqam Nahwand with Rahawi-Nawah for this Shabbat.

On **Shabbat Shemini**, we have two opinions of what to do for this

year. According to Hakham Moshe Ashear, Maqam Rast should be applied because it is the first Shabbat after Passover (it is traditional to begin to read Pirkei Avot every Shabbat until Shavuot). According to the Red "Shir Ushbatah Hallel Vezimrah" pizmonim book, Maqam Hoseni (Arabic for "beauty") should be applied (whether it is before or after Passover) because the parashah deals with the dedication of the Mishkan and the Mishkan is something of great beauty.

When **Tazria-Metzora** are combined, the Red Pizmonim Book says to apply Maqam Saba because Tazria opens with the birth of the baby boy and with him getting circumcised on the eighth day. Maqam Saba is used for covenants; specifically the Brit Milah. However, being that this is the Shabbat prior to Israel's Independence Day, some congregations have the tradition to

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apply Maqam Nahwand, because many of the Israeli melodies (including the Tikvah—Israeli National Anthem) are in this maqam. It is interesting to note that Moshe Ashear's notes from 1937 indicate to apply Maqam Nahwand for this very scenario despite the fact that he lived prior to Israel's Independence in 1948!

When **Aharei Mot-Kedoshim** are combined, Hijaz, the maqam that is applied to commemorate a death or a tragedy, should be applied. It is appropriate to apply this maqam when Aharei Mot is read, because the parashah opens up with the deaths of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron. However, according to Gabriel Shrem, when Aharei Mot and Kedoshim are combined, Hijaz should be mixed with Maqam Bayat (a more neutral maqam, which is not sad) in order to dilute the sad tone of the prayers.

On **Shabbat Emor**, Maqam Sigah, a maqam used for the holidays, is applied, because this parashah discusses all the holidays. In addition to that, the (Sigah) pizmon "Bar Yohai," which is about Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai, is traditionally applied to the prayers, because Lag La'Omer, the holiday which among other things commemorates this rabbi, falls out in the upcoming week.

When **Behar-Behukotai** are combined, the Red Pizmonim Book says to apply Saba. It was Moshe Ashear's opinion to use Rast/Mahour when Behar-Behukotai are combined and when the Shabbat prior to Shavuot is the following Shabbat. Since Maqam Rast would be missed this year for Shabbat Bemidbar (due to it being Hoseni, the Shabbat prior to Shavuot), it would be appropriate to make Rast up by doing it this week, which is one week prior to the norm. Another opinion is to apply Maqam Nahwand, because Jerusalem Day is in the upcoming week and the pizmon "Yerushalayim Shel Zahab" is in Maqam Nahwand. Again, please recall, Moshe Ashear lived prior to the events of 1967 and thus did not have a Jerusalem Day, and a reason to apply Maqam Nahwand to honor the non-existent holiday.

A special thanks to Mr. Joey Mosseri, Senior Advisor to the Sephardic Pizmonim Project and Moderator of the Sephardic Hazzanut Forum, for providing some of this valuable information to us.

You can find the official "Maqam of the Week" list on page 565 in the Red Shir Ushbaha Hallel Vezimrah Pizmonim book. You can also learn a lot more of the commentary that surrounds it by visiting the "Weekly Maqam" section of www.pizmonim.com. We will provide you with another "Maqam of the Week" installment in a future issue of IMAGE. □