

# Maqam of the Week

## Winter 2009 — Book of Exodus

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The following is a continuation of our ongoing “Maqam of the Week” series brought to you by the Sephardic Pizmonim Project ([www.pizmonim.com](http://www.pizmonim.com)).

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* (weekly Torah portion). 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. Allow me to explain why and when some of the maqamat will be used throughout this winter 2009 season—specifically during the 11 parashat of the Book of Exodus (Sefer Shemot).

On **Shabbat Parashat Shemot**, Maqam Rast (Arabic: head), a maqam that is associated with “beginnings,” is applied because Shemot is the first parashah in the Book of Shemot. Rast is also used for the afternoon Shabbat services because it is when we begin to read the new parashah for the upcoming week.

On **Shabbat Vaera**, there is no definite agreed upon maqam to use. Some sources say to use Maqam Hoseni and some sources say to use Maqam Nawah. There is no definite explanation that we can provide



as to why the sources say what they do. One suggestion for Nawah may be because we are reading about the Passover story and Maqam Nawah is said to be associated with Passover. Another suggestion may be because there is a pizmon in the Nawah section on page 361-II that discusses the 10 plagues—a topic covered in this Torah portion. Maqam Nawah contains the same melody as the traditional way of reading the Mishnah.

On **Shabbat Bo**, Maqam Sigah is applied because this is the third parashah in Shemot and Sigah means third place (in Persian). This maqam will be familiar to many because its melody is the same as the Syrian way of reading from the Torah.

On **Shabbat Beshalach**, which is also known as Shabbat Shira,

Maqam Ajam is applied according to all sources. In this parashah, we read about the splitting of the Red Sea and the miracles that were performed by G-d immediately after the liberation from Egypt. Ajam, which is known as “the happy maqam,” is the most appropriate maqam to express our joy and gratitude for the miracles that G-d performed for us.

On **Shabbat Yitro**, we read about the Ten Commandments and the preparations as we, the Israelites, stood in anticipation by Mount Sinai. Hoseni (Arabic: beautiful) will be applied, alluding to the beauty of the Torah. Maqam Hoseni sounds like a higher version of Maqam Bayat. Maqam Hoseni is also used in association with Shavuot, the holiday that commemorates the receiving of the Torah.

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# Maqam...

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On **Shabbat Mishpatim**, Maqam Saba (Arabic: baby boy) is applied. Maqam Saba is used to remember the covenant between man and G-d. In a parashah with so many mitzvot (commandments) such as this one, it is fitting to apply Saba, because following the mitzvot is showing that we are remembering the covenant. Another opinion is to use Maqam Nawah, the maqam associated with Kabbalat Shabbat, for this parashah. The reason for this is because the opening of the parashah discusses that the Hebrew slave works for six years and then goes free (rests) on the seventh year. This concept of resting on the seventh is associated with Shabbat—where one works for six days and rests on the seventh day. The same rule goes with Parashat Behar.

On **Shabbat Terumah**, Maqam Hoseni is applied because the parashah introduces us to the concept of a *mishkan* (tabernacle) and a *miqdash* (sanctuary). Since the mishkan is something of great beauty, Maqam Hoseni, the word for beauty, is applied.

On **Shabbat Tesave**, which coincides with Shabbat Zachor, Maqam Sigah is applied. The reason is because Purim is approaching in the upcoming week. Since most of the pizmonim of Purim are from Maqam Sigah (pages 459-467), it is appropriate to use this maqam in the prayers in order to make use of the Purim melodies. Please note, that even on years that Tesave is not the Shabbat prior to Purim, Maqam Sigah is still applied, but without the Purim melodies used in the prayers.

On **Shabbat Ki Tisa**, Hijaz, the “sad maqam,” is applied because we read about the sin of the golden calf—a major tragedy and setback for Bnai Israel.

On **Shabbat Vayakhel-Pekudei**, Maqam Bayat-Hoseni is applied because we read here of the building of the mishkan. Once again, the mishkan is beautiful, and therefore Maqam Hoseni should be used. On years when the parashat are read separately, you would apply Hoseni for Vayakhel and Nawah for Pekudei.

You can find the official list of which maqam to use for which parashah 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 [www.pizmonim.com](http://www.pizmonim.com). We will provide you with another “Maqam of the Week” installment in a future issue of IMAGE. □