

# Maqam of the Week

## Autumn 2008 — Book of Genesis

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As you may recall, IMAGE Magazine has collaborated with the Sephardic Pizmonim Project in providing you with the Maqam of the Week on its monthly calendar in the back of each issue.

To review, we have mentioned that the Syrian Sephardic Jewish community has a beautiful tradition of using a different maqam each Shabbat for the prayers in the synagogue. A maqam (in Arabic) is a melody type and set of related tunes. The melodies used in a given maqam aim effectively to express the mood of the cantor throughout the prayers. Which maqam will be used is based on the story/theme of the parashah (weekly Torah portion).

The 10 main maqamot generally used are: Rast, Mahour, Ajam, Nahwand, Saba, Sigah, Bayat, Hoseni, Rahawi/Nawah, and Hijaz. Each of these maqamat have different melodies and have different reasons as to why they are used. Allow me to briefly explain why and when some of the maqamat will be used throughout this Autumn 2008 season.

There are 12 parashat throughout the Book of Genesis (Bereshit). Every maqam is used throughout the weeks of Sefer Bereshit except for Maqam Hoseni, whose first appearance is Parashat Yitro in honor of the giving of the Torah.

For Shabbat Bereshit, Maqam Rast, which means head or beginning, is used. It is used because it is the first parashah of the first book of the Torah. Maqam Rast is also used for other beginnings, such as the beginnings of Sefer Shemot, Vayikra, and sometimes Bamidbar.

For Shabbat Noah, Maqam Sigah, which is Persian for third place, is used. There are many different suggestions as to why this maqam is used. One explanation is

that it is used for the building of something. In this case, we are referring to the building of the *tebah* (ark).

For Shabbat Lech-Lecha, Maqam Saba, which means baby boy, is used. It is the maqam used to symbolize the covenant. In this case, Abraham and his followers receive the brit milah covenant (circumcision). Maqam Saba portrays the emotion of pain and crying, just like a baby cries at the brit milah.

For Shabbat Vayera, Maqam Nawah should be used. In the Tehillim, a synonym for angel is nawah kodesh. The reason why we use this maqam this week is because in the beginning of the parashah, three angels visit Abraham to give him news. Nowadays, Maqam Nahwand is used by most congregations instead of Maqam Nawah, but this is a deviation from our tradition.

For Shabbat Chayei Sara, Maqam Hijaz, which is named after the Arabian Peninsula, is used. This maqam is reserved specifically for sad events. In the beginning of this parashah, Sarah passes away and then Abraham passes away at the end of the parashah.

For Shabbat Toldot, Maqam Mahour, which means angered in Arabic, is used. It is a higher version of Maqam Rast. This maqam is only used twice throughout the year. In this parashah, Esau is very angered at his brother Jacob for stealing his birthright and blessings from him.

For Shabbat Vayetzei, Maqam Ajam, which is named after Persia, is applied. This is a maqam reserved for happy occasions, especially the wedding ceremony. In this parashah, Jacob's wedding is celebrated.

For Shabbat Vayishlach, Maqam Saba is used because the

people of Shechem are tricked into getting a brit milah. Another reason for using Saba is because Jacob made a covenant with G-d in this parashah. Some use Maqam Sigah for Shabbat Vayishlach.

For Shabbat Vayeshev, Maqam Nahwand is generally used. This maqam is used when there is trouble and disharmony in the parashah. In this case, it is Joseph's brothers who cause the disharmony with hatred and jealousy for their brother. They throw him into a pit and sell him into slavery.

For Shabbat Miketz, Maqam Sigah is used because this is the week of Hanukkah, which is the holiday of the menorah. Whenever there is a mention of the menorah in the parashah, Maqam Sigah is usually used. Maqam Sigah might be very familiar to most people because it is the same maqam that we read the Torah with.

For Shabbat Vayigash, Maqam Bayat is used. This maqam symbolizes an oath between two parties. In this case, Judah makes an oath to Joseph on behalf of his younger brother, Benjamin. Maqam Bayat is also used at Bar Mitzvahs, because this is a time of a person's life when he makes an oath with G-d.

For Shabbat Vayehi, Maqam Hijaz is used, because the parashah contains the death of Jacob and subsequently Joseph.

Remember, you can find all of this on page 565 in the Red Shir Ushbaha Hallel Vezimrah Pizmonim book. You can also learn a lot more by visiting [www.pizmonim.com](http://www.pizmonim.com). We will attempt to provide you with another 'Maqam of the Week' installment every other month. □

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