



## Jewish and Klezmer Violin Style:

### Part 2

by Cookie Segelstein

When I teach Jewish fiddle style, often times my students are not Jewish or are rediscovering the European part of their family history. Many times, there was not an abundance of Ashkenaz [*the Central and Eastern European Jewish culture – Stacy*] tradition in their homes. Most don't speak Yiddish (some have never even heard of it), and if they are Jewish their families are very assimilated.

So of course, I must teach this style through musical techniques. To do this I must break down a style with many nuances into tiny understandable elements. Of course part of this study includes demonstration, and listening to the few old

recordings we have of Jewish style fiddle playing. But since Jews lived in so many places in Eastern Europe, there are many different traditions that can be called "Jewish". So it's also necessary to study the styles of music that was played by host cultures wherever Jews lived. So I always bring in recorded examples of Gypsy, Moldavian, Ukrainian and of course, Romanian violinists. So much of the repertoire is shared, that it's often hard to tell the styles apart, and in many cases, the same melody is claimed by several cultures.

Let's examine some of the musical elements of the Jewish style. The first important element of this music is its elemental building material, the *modes*.

The Jewish modes are named after the prayers of Jewish worship that typically contain their tonalities. These have many similarities to Turkish and Arab *maqams* (see <http://www.maqamworld.com/>).

According to Josh Horowitz in his article, *The Main Klezmer Modes*

"Klezmer modes are comprised of more than 7 notes - a fact which alone makes them unsuited to Western heptatonic theory. A mode, then, is more than just a scale, implying also the way the notes making it up are used. Each mode implicitly contains a mood and a set of motives, which are specific to it, though the melodic contour of these motives overlaps extensively from mode to mode, whereby the intervals are the varying factor. Cantorial recitative improvisations (Yidd. *zogachts*), as well as klezmer tunes and improvisations, utilize these motives as their melodic basis. The basic content of a mode can be represented as a scale, though this can only provide a partial understanding of the mode. Therefore each mode has it's own typical scalar form, motivic scheme, and typical cadence forms."

Here is a study sheet containing just that, the modes in scale form, typical motives and cadences. It is interesting to note that players of this music often don't use the modes in their whole, but often exchange tetrachords of modes, similar to the Turkish maqam system.

For those familiar with music theory jargon, Mishebeyrakh is an altered Dorian, Adonoy Molokh is altered Mixolydian, and Freygish is like a displaced harmonic minor (played from the 5th step of that scale).

The *changing tones* are the tones in the mode that can be raised or lowered in a melody. The chord at the end of the staffs indicates a I in the mode. So D freygish would have a D major chord as its tonic.

*[In future issues Cookie will delve more deeply into the nature and use of these klezmer modes. – Stacy]*

**About the Author:**

**Cookie Segelstein**, received her Masters degree in Viola from The Yale School of Music. She has taught klezmer fiddling at KlezKamp and The Festival of American Fiddle Tunes. Her band, Veretski Pass, has two CD's on Golden Horn, the newest titled *Trafik* ([www.goldenhorn.com](http://www.goldenhorn.com)) For more information visit [www.veretskipass.com](http://www.veretskipass.com)

# Scale Form of the Main Klezmer Modes

## AHAVA RABBOH (Freygish)

Scale



Motive



Typical Cadence

Cm

D

## MI SHEBEYRAKH

Scale



*Changing Tone*  
\*

*Changing Tone*  
\*

Motives using changing tones



Typical Cadence

A

Dm



## ADONNOY MOLOKH

Scale



*Changing Tone*  
\*

*Changing Tone*  
\*

Motives using changing tones



Typical Cadence

A

D

## MOGEN OVOS (minor)

Scale



*Changing Tone*  
\*

*Changing Tones*  
\* \*

Motives using changing tones



Typical Cadence

A

Dm

A

Dm



## YISHTABAKH

Scale



*Changing Tone*  
\*

*Changing Tones*  
\* \* \*

Motives using changing tones



Typical Cadence

A

Dm

A

Dm

