

## “Ab” or “Menacheem”?

In our community we use two names for the fifth month of the Jewish year. The first nine days this month is called “Ab”. From the 11<sup>th</sup> onwards it is called “Menacheem”. About the 10<sup>th</sup> there is no consensus, sometimes it is called “10 Ab”, sometimes “10 Menacheem”. It would be logical to call it “Ab”, as will be explained. Some communities use the combination “Menacheem Ab” in the second part of the month, but we don’t.

### So far the “tradition”. But is this correct?

Ab is the month of the destruction of the first and second temple, a time of mourning. The fast on 9 Ab is the climax of the mourning period, which starts three weeks earlier, on the 17 Tammuz. The name “Ab” therefore has a negative association. The name of the month changes after the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month into “Menacheem”, which means “comforting”. Note also the name of the first Shabbat after the fast of 9 Ab: it is called “Saba Nachamu”, the “Sabbath of Comforting”.

The 10<sup>th</sup> itself has special status. According to Shulchan Aruch (ש"ע או"ח תקנח), after midday the mourning for the Ashkenazim is over. But the Sephardim follow the opinion that the whole 10<sup>th</sup> of the month is a day of mourning. Actually, rabbi Jochahan (תענית כ"ט) made the statement that if he would have lived in the generation where the fast was introduced, he would have chosen for the 10<sup>th</sup> of Ab, rather than for the 9<sup>th</sup> as Chazal (the Sages) decided, because the major burning of the temple took place on the 10<sup>th</sup>. According to this opinion it should be logical to use the name “Ab” also for the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month.

### The logic is simple.

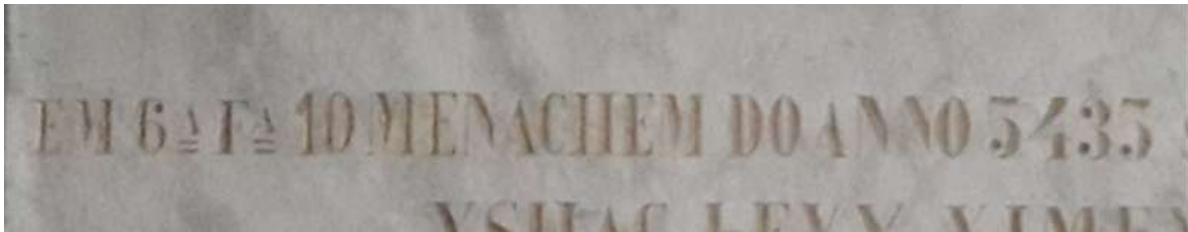
When looking into our archives, there is consensus about the first nine days. It’s always called “Ab”. I found only one instance using “Menacheem” for the 6<sup>th</sup> of the month, but this may be an error. But what happens on the 10<sup>th</sup> and from the 11<sup>th</sup> onwards seems random, as if depending on the person which wrote the specific document.

Important to note is the remark pointed out to me by rabbi Serfaty that halachically the name “Ab” is preferred in legal documents, but using the name “Menacheem” is valid too.

(ש"ע אה"ע קכ"ו; ספר גט כשר שם; וכן פתחי תשובה שם סימן יב).

### In marble...

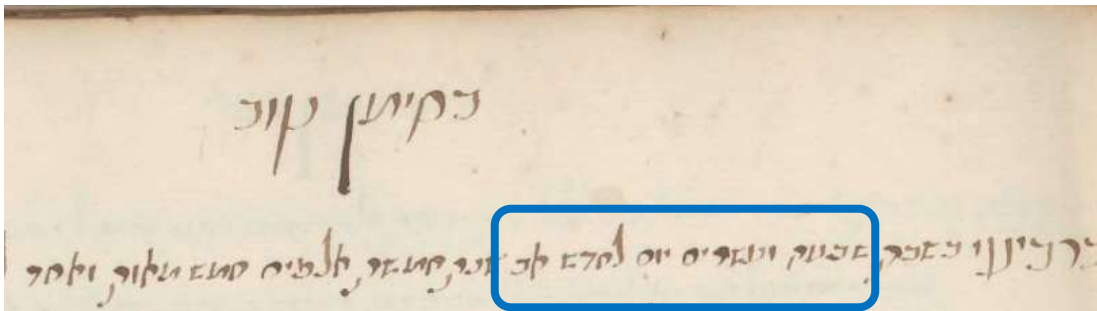
Most dominant are the two big marble memorial plates left and right of the hechal in Snoge, placed in 1875. Both use the name “Menacheem”. The left plate even uses “Menacheem” for the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month. This date refers to Friday, 10 Menacheem 5435 (1675), the day before Saba Nachamu on which say the Snoge was inaugurated.



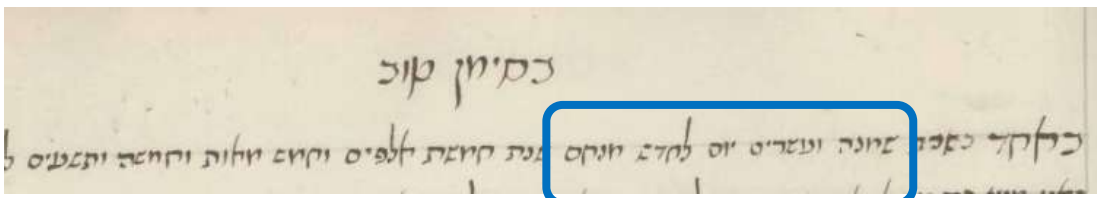
10 Menacheem 5435 = 1675

### Cetubot

In Cetubot (marriage certificates) I found both “Menacheem” and “Ab”:



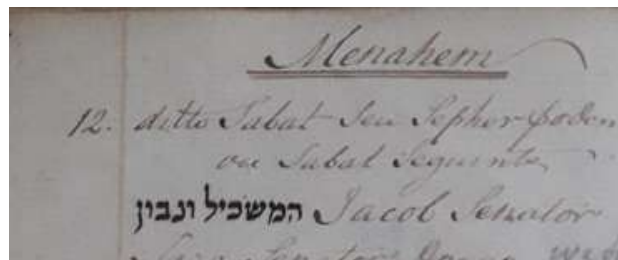
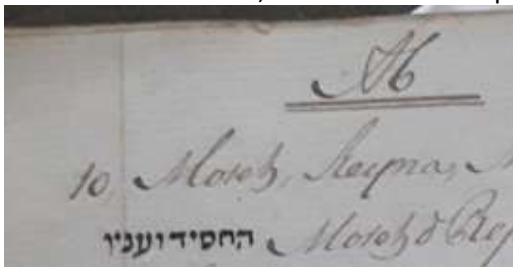
27 Ab 5501 = 1741



28 Menacheem 5575 = 1825

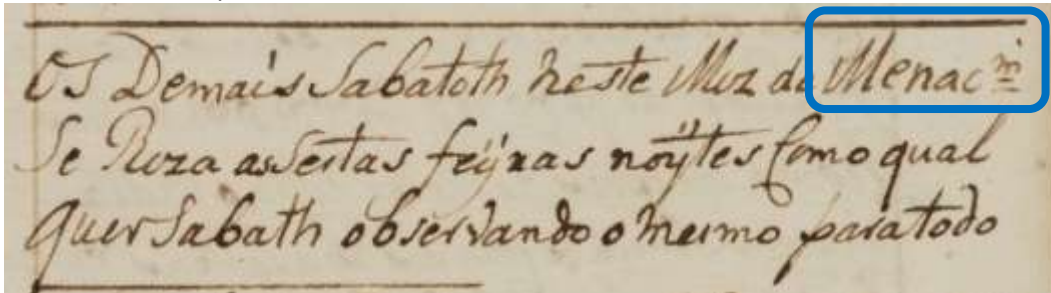
### Ascabot books

In the yearly Ascabot (calendar-based memorial prayers) books I found on the page having the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> the name **Ab**, and from the next page, starting the 12<sup>th</sup>, the name **Menacheem**.



### Seder Hazzanut

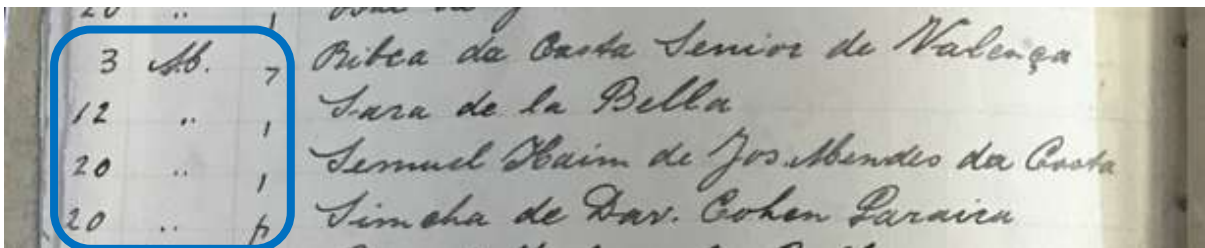
In Seder Hazzanut Jessurun Pinto (1758) I found “Menacheem” after 9 Ab, but only in a general context. The 10<sup>th</sup> specific wasn’t mentioned.



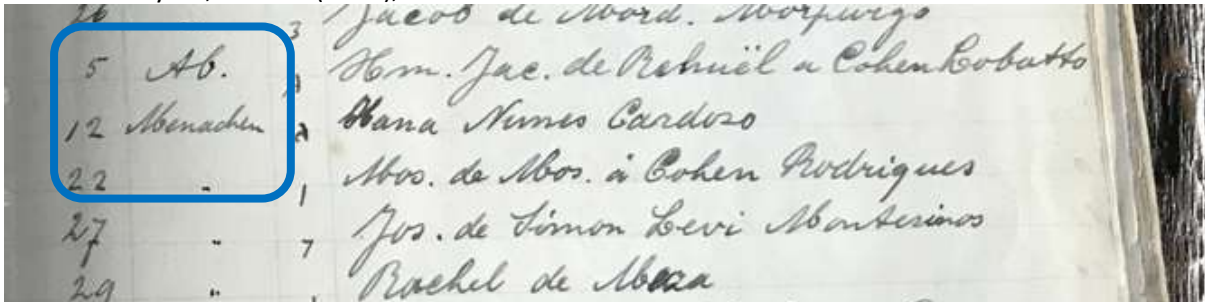
In another Seder Hazzanut (about 1800) and in Seder Hazzanut Brandon (1892) “Menacheem” is not used. Only the specific day of 15 Ab (טו באב) is mentioned. Mind that I found no place where טו באב was called טו מנחם (15 Menacheem).

### 11 months register

Most interesting is the 11 months Ascabot book started by Chazzan Duque. In 5683 (1923) he uses **Ab** for the whole month:



But the next year, in 5685 (1924), he uses **Ab & Menacheem**.

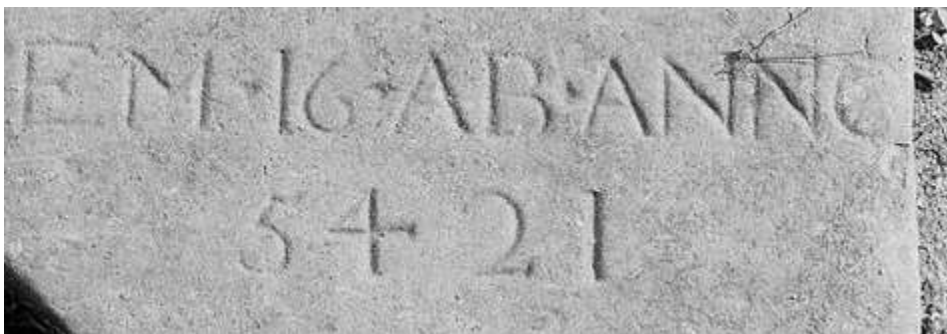


### Matsevot (tombstones)

Also on matsevot (tombstones) I find both:



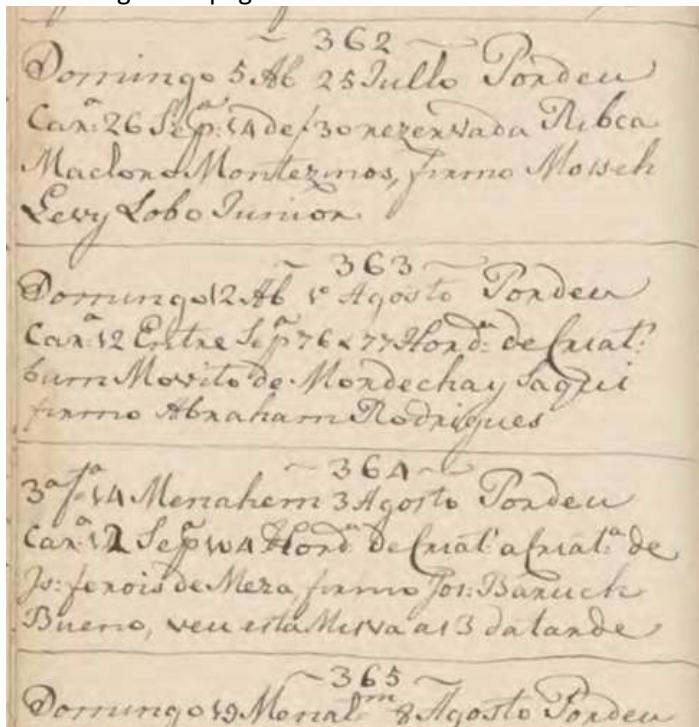
14 Menacheem 5440 = 1684



16 Ab 5421 ==1661

### Burial registers

I also looked into the burial registers of the cemetery. Here too I find all combinations. Most interesting is the page below from 1762 which has **5 and 12 Ab**, followed by **14 Menacheem**.



## Burial card

Burial cards were made in the 1970's and digitised later.

אבן  
Geslachtsnaam: ABENACAR DA COSTA  
Naam: Yahacob van Menasseh  
Begraven 6 menahem 5459 1 aug 1699

Burial card: 6 Menacheem 5459 - 1699

This is the only instance I found using “Menacheem” for the first days of the month. It may be a typing error. The matseva itself has subsided and would have to be excavated to check it. And unfortunately the very old picture of the matseva is almost illegible.

I tried to check this in the burial registers, but I couldn't find burial registers from before 1750.

## Various notes

Finally I looked in the [note on Portuguese minhagim](#) by Haham S. Pereira. He doesn't mention “Menacheem” at all. His nephew, Rabbi H. Pereira writes in a [note on transcription](#) that from the 10<sup>th</sup> onwards the month is called “Menacheem”.

## Conclusion

There is no doubt that the first days of the month are called “Ab”, and that 15 Ab is called “Tu Be'Ab”. About the 10<sup>th</sup> and onwards we see both “Ab” as well as “Menacheem”. Apparently, “דעביד כמר עביד ודעביד כמר עביד” - either way is OK. The combination “Menacheem-Ab” is found nowhere and must be regarded as an Ashkenazi naming.

Mind that I checked only random in the various archives to reach this conclusion. There are thousands of cetubot and tombstones. Checking all would exceed by large the scope of this note. But the limited check doesn't indicate that this has been changed over time. Both “Ab” and “Menacheem” were found in all periods, from 1600 till today.

יהפוך אותו הקדוש ברוך הוא לששון ולשמחה  
May the Lord turn it (the month Ab) into joy and gladness!