Rabbi Isaac ben Abraham Abohab (Spain, 14th Century)

Rabbi Isaac ben Abraham Abohab was a Talmudic scholar from Spain. We do not know the exact dates of his birth or death, or where exactly did he live. There were at least another two Rabbis with a similar name: Rabbi Isaac Abohab, the Gaon of castilla (b. in Spain, 1433-1493), and Rabbi Isaac Abohab de Fonseca (b. in Portugal, 1605-1693).

Our rabbi Isaac Abohab is known for his pen name, Menorat haMaor, his most celebrated book. Rabbi Abohab was a very learned man in Talmud, all aspects of rabbinical Judaism and also in classic philosophy.

He was a businessman, not a community Rabbi. Toward the end of his life he dedicated almost exclusively to write Menorat haMaor. In his introduction, and out of a deep sense of humility, he assures his readers that he composed his book chiefly for his own use as a public speaker.

Menorat haMaor, "A shining menora" is a book that contains the ethical and spiritual teachings of the Rabbis of the Talmud, some times with the commentaries of Geonim and other rabbinical authorities. It is considered a classic and it serves as a virtual encyclopedia of Jewish values. It touches upon subjects dealing with human nature and human psychology.

It is divided into seven *nerot,* candles or branches, like the Biblical Menora. Each branch represents one principle of Jewish ethics.

The 1st branch, for example, deals with identifying and avoiding excessive behaviors. It follows the Rabbis' statement that there are three "pitfalls", that if not avoided, might cause our own destruction. Envy (excessive competition, destructive jealousy), lust (obsession for food, sex or money) and kabod (obsession with self glory, recognition, image). In this chapter the author describes in detail each of these categories, the outcome of following these paths and the ways to stay away from them.

Menorat haMaor became one of the most important books in Sephardic communities and beyond. It is a book that could be read and reread to find inspiration and guidance for virtually all areas related to our daily life. Menorat haMaor is not a short book and it was studied in Talmud Tora by young children and also by adults, every Shabbat before Minha. This custom persists even today in several Sephardic communities. Yemenite communities have an enormous esteem for Menorat haMaor and in some Yemenite congregations, to this day, it is the subject of their daily Tora studying

The book Menorat haMaor was published dozens of times. Including several contemporary editions. It was translated to Spanish, German,

Yiddish and parts of it into English (I do not know if is there a complete English translation…).

These are the subjects of the seven nerot or branches (in my own words)

1st branch: Avoiding excesses.
2nd branch: Keeping away from damaging or negative speech.
3rd branch: Diligence in the observance of Mitsvot.
4th branch: The value of studying Tora consistently.
5th branch: Teshuba, the ways and practice of repentance.
6th branch: The pursue of peace and harmony.
7th branch: Behaving with humbleness and simplicity.

You can download the book Menorat haMaor from www.hebrewbooks.org