

# CHANUKAH

## Source Material- Teacher's Guide

This is source material and a teachers' guide that is designed for teachers or self-learners on the topic of Chanukah. This is an overview of the historical and philosophical basis of the fast using classical source material in Hebrew with an English translation.

## Teachers' Companion for the Sources

### Source 1

During Chanukah we recite Al HaNissim in every Amida prayer and every Bentsching. This begins with the words "In the days of Matisyahu ben Yochanan the Cohen Gadol, Chashmonai and his sons..."

The question is, 'who was Chashmonai'?

The simple understanding is that Matisyahu was also called Chashmonai, but this is difficult to maintain, as we will show. Other options are that Yochanan was called Chashmonai, or that someone else in an earlier generation had that name, or that Matisyahu had a brother (or friend) called Chashmonai.

### Source 2

The Beis Yosef suggests (in the name of the Orchos Chaim) that Chashmonai refers to Yochanan's family name or is a title of greatness.

### Source 3-4

Chashmon is a place name which occurs twice in Tanach (referring to two different places – one in Israel and one in the Sinia desert). Perhaps Chashmonai is a title based on Yochanan's birthplace, or prime location.

There is a discrepancy between different versions of the Sages and the Al HaNissim prayer in the siddur. If the text says 'and Chashmonai' with the letter 'vav', it implies that Chashmonai is not a description of Yochanan, but is a different person. Without the letter 'vav', 'and', Chashmonai modifies Yochanan.

### Source 5-6

These explanations of Chashmonai fit with our wording of the Al HaNissim prayer – 'Yochanan Chashmonai...', Yochanan (the) Chashmonai. According to many commentators, Yochanan was Chashmonai.

David ben Josef ben David Abudraham (fl. 1340) or Abudarham was a rishon who lived at Seville, Spain, and who was known for his commentary on the siddur. He is said to have been a student of Jacob ben Asher (Baal Haturim).

R. Yehuda bar Yakar was a Rishon who lived in the 12th and 13th century. He was the Rebbe of the Ramban, and wrote a sefer on Tefillot and Brachot, Ma'ayan Ganim.

### Source 7-8

Two of the oldest sources we have about Chanukah, Maseches Sofrim and the Talmud Bavli seem to imply that Chashmonai was a different hero, apart from Yochanan, Matisyahu and Shimon HaTzadik.

### Source 9

Rashi implies that Chashmonai was someone other than Yochanan or Matisyahu, and that it was his sons who fought the war, and not Matisyahu and his sons (because Matisyahu didn't have twelve sons – see sources 14-15 below). His source is perhaps the Midrash Tanchuma, which says the same thing.

### Source 10

This source states explicitly that Matisyahu is not the same person as Chashmonai, since the daughter of one was betrothed to the son of the other.

### Source 11

Dikdukei Sofrim is a 19th century collection of alternate texts of the Talmud compiled by Raphael Natan Rabbinovicz. It brings a different version of the Talmud in Megillah (source 8) which removes the implication of Chashmonai being someone other than Yochanan or Matisyahu.

### Source 12

Josephus writes about the Chanukah story (and is the source for the Orchos Chaim in source 2). However (unlike the Orchos Chaim's understanding) it seems that Josephus understands that Chashmonai is not the father of Matisyahu but a much earlier ancestor.

### Source 13-14

There is a clear discrepancy between the midrashim as to how many 'chashmonaim' there were. There are several references to the sons of Matisyahu corresponding to the tribes, for example in Megillas Antiochus (p. 17 in the TorahLab edition). But only a few sources mention that there were actually 12 people leading the fighting (including the Rashi above in source 9).

### Source 15-17

There are three positions on the identity of the famous Yohanan the Cohen Gadol:

1. The Rambam is of the view that he was the son of Matisyahu, of Hanukah fame, evidently named after his own grandfather. (This opinion is also found in Roke'ah in Hilkhos Hanukah)
2. Seder Ha-Doros states that Yohanan the Cohen Gadol was Matisyahu's father and is the one mentioned in the "Al Ha-Nissim." (This opinion is also found in Sefer Yuchsin 1:16).

Seder Ha-Doros was written by Yechiel ben Shlomo Heilprin (ca. 1660–ca. 1746) who was a Lithuanian rabbi, kabalist, and chronicler. He was a descendant of Solomon Luria, and traced his genealogy back through Rashi to the tanna Johanan ha-Sandlar.

3. Later scholars, including Doros Ha-Rishonim, are of the view that Yochanan the Cohen Gadol was the grandson of Matisyahu and the son of Shimon. (This opinion is also found in Toledos Tanna'im Ve-Amora'im vol. 2 p. 688).

Doros Ha-Rishonim was written by Yitzhak Isaac Halevy (Rabinowitz) (September 21, 1847–May 15, 1914) who was a rabbi, Jewish historian, and founder of the Agudath Israel organization.

### Source 18-19

These are two suggestions from the Tashbetz and the Vilna Gaon to resolve the different sources.

Also known as Rashbatz, Rav Shimon ben Tzemach Duran was born in Majorca, Spain in 1361. In 1391, in the face of massacres in Spain, he fled to Algiers, where he ultimately succeeded Rivash as Chief Rabbi. His most famous work is his responsa, known as Tashbetz, which discuss all aspects of Jewish life.