

## ***“The Sweet Smell Of Success”***

The *gemara* we learned in the past few weeks has been discussing the sanctity of Torah study and the state of purity one must be in when studying it. On the bottom of 24b, the *gemara* said that one is also forbidden from reciting shema when in a place which has a repulsive smell and if he is in the midst of reciting it, must stop until he is out of that area. This *halacha* also applies to the study, and even thinking about Torah.

The *gemara* in Tractate *Sukkah* (28a) relates the various attributes and special conduct of the great Tannaic sage *Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai*. Among the praises about him, the *gemara* says that he “*never thought in Torah when in a place with a foul smell*”. Rav Yosef

Chaim of Baghdad (1832-1909), best known for his halachic sefer *Ben Ish Chai*, asks in his sefer “*Ben Yehoyada*” what the great significance this is. If this is, as our *gemara* in *Brachos* says, the law, then obviously he must refrain from “thinking in Torah learning” while in such places. Why then does the *gemara* recognize this as a significant accomplishment of *Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai* when indeed we are all obligated to do so?

Rav Yosef Chaim explains that indeed this is obligatory upon everyone, however, it is easier said than done. When a person occasionally gets involved in a specific topic, it is fairly easy to take one's mind off the topic. When one is fully enveloped in it, however, it is virtually impossible to completely take his mind totally off of it. Great Torah sages like *Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai* were constantly involved and contemplating Torah, as the *gemara* relates (*Sukkah* ibid) that he did not go 4 *amos* (approx 7 feet) without [contemplating] Torah. For such a person it is indeed a colossal accomplishment to refrain from learning due to the foul environment one is in, thus the *gemara* considers this a tremendous accomplishment of *Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai*.

How does one reach, or at least goal towards, such a lofty level. The *Maharsha* (Rabbi Shmuel Eidels 1555-1631) explains that when one sufficiently appreciates the sanctity of Torah, that it is not merely “another” subject and wisdom, rather a G-d given Torah, one will eventually be able to exercise complete control over his subconscious thoughts to the degree that *Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai* was and not desecrate it by thinking about it in foul smelling places and the like. We kiss our Torah books and treat them with enormous love and respect, as well as pray each day for our eyes and hearts to be open to understanding the phenomenal gift of His Torah and Hashem should help each of us appreciate the extent of the holiness of the sacred Torah and come closer and closer to the level of *Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai*.