



penetrate one's heart that is soft. Was that really what did it? Was that *kal v'chomer* really the fuel? **The Gra tells us that a question arose in Rabbi Akiva's mind when he saw the hole carved out from the water drops. Was it after thousands upon thousands of drops that the rock gave way, or was it that each and every drop contributed to hollowing out the stone? Rabbi Akiva understood that it was each and every individual drop that contributed to the hollowing of the stone. There is no drop of effort, no matter how small, that does not count. Every letter of Torah learning, every word, every pasuk, every Mishna, every line of Gemara and every difficult word in Tosfos and every single halacha in Shulchan Aruch counts. Once this was crystal clear to Rabbi Akiva there was no stopping him.** He now had a new belief about learning. His old belief kept him from ever trying to learn, and he was so angry at himself that he would grit his teeth when he would see a real talmid chacham go by (*mesechas Pesachim* (49b)). For forty years he believed that there was no point trying to learn, because he did not believe he could succeed. But after he saw the water, he understood that every effort does make a difference....and will....if the drops keep falling. **The problem is that you cannot notice the difference after the first drop, or even after many hundreds of drops. Only if you stick it out, in the long run you will reap the true reward for your accumulative efforts.** This is comparable to a king who challenges any one of his subjects to climb the one thousand flights in his royal tower, promising half of his kingdom and his daughter in marriage. Of course, hundreds of young men begin climbing the steps of the royal tower, each one determined to make it to the top. But few, if any, are aware of how many steps there are between each flight and there are a total of one thousand flights! As they proceed, most drop out after the first twenty stories. Some even make it to fifty, still less to seventy and only a handful make it to the ninetieth. **They reason was that if it was this tiresome to reach the ninetieth, then how could they possibly reach the 1000<sup>th</sup>? What they didn't know was that at the 100<sup>th</sup> floor, there is an elevator that ascends straight to the top of the tower. We cannot always see our progress, but the power of accumulation is that eventually you can reach a point that you get Divine Assistance, and that is the elevator.** The Mechilta says all beginnings are hard. (כל התחלות קשות.)