

## The RYS Daily 6/14/07 Mussar Doctrine XIII

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First impressions are not discernible to the human eye. Examining his inner self initially, a person does not notice any change. Yet, after the impressions multiply they combine together and create a complete revolution within his personality. This may be compared to "the cumulative effect of drops of water that keep dripping on a stone day after day for a period of many years. Eventually, they will wear the stone away although, when the first drop fell, the effect was imperceptible."

R. Israel drew his support from a characteristic Talmudic Aggadah: "What was the beginning of R. Akiva? They said: He was forty years old and had not learned a thing. Once he was standing at the mouth of a well. He said: What wore away the stone? They said to him: The water that falls on it constantly day after day. They said to him: Akiva, have you not read (the verse) : `The waters wear away the stone'? Immediately, R. Akiva applied this a fortiori to his own situation: If the soft can mold the hard — then the words of the Torah which are as hard as iron can all the more engrave themselves on my heart which is flesh and blood. Immediately he went back to study Torah.

It was in this Aggadah that R. Israel discerned the cumulative effect of single impressions. "When R. Akiva first began to study, he noticed that he felt no effect within himself. His heart tormented him by saying: The effort is in vain (since without fear — there is no wisdom). He was expending his strength to no avail, G-d forbid. Yet when he saw that water had worn away stone — even though there was no perceptible effect at first - he asserted his might and main to reinforce his intention. R. Akiva applied the analogy of the effect of the water to all impressions. Even though imperceptible, they are not lost. In the course of time, as their number increases, they produce their effect. And he drew the conclusion from here that by means of these impressions resulting from study, one is capable of changing his nature. He had discovered how to effect his own improvement "and immediately reverted to Torah study."

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