

Who chanced upon you on the way. (25:18)

Rashi comments, “Amalek cooled you off from your burning heat.” The nations feared the Jewish People, thus, they distanced themselves from any altercation with them. Amalek assuaged their fears. This may be compared to a scalding hot bath which everyone fears entering. Suddenly, one man comes along and jumps in. He is scalded, but now others no longer fear the bath. He “cooled” it off for others. The analogy seems incorrect. On the contrary, once the people observe the burn status of the man who jumped in, they will surely stay away. Likewise, once the nations saw what happened to Amalek, they had every reason not to attack the Jews.

Horav A. Henach Leibowitz, zl, explains that the reason that people stayed away from the scalding bath waters was partially that they feared being burned. Furthermore, they thought that it was impossible to jump in (because of the heat). In other words, they feared becoming scalded, and they thought that it was impossible to enter the burning hot waters. Likewise, the nations feared the Jewish People like a normal person fears a hot bath. Also (as a result), they conjectured that it was an impossibility to achieve. One cannot simply enter a scalding hot bath.

Amalek showed them otherwise. True, he was badly burned, but he broke the notion that it was impossible. If enough people do the “impossible,” it becomes possible. Amalek was burnt, but the stigma surrounding the Jews had lapsed. It could be done. They might become burned – but it could be done.

We now have a deeper insight into the effect that exposure to *chillul Shabbos* and a lack of *kashrus* observance and lack of other religious observance has on the unsuspecting eye. At first, one who sees others participating in sinful behavior will say, “That would never happen to me.” After seeing it more often, however, his defenses begin to wear down when he sees others like him, with a similar background, for some inexplicable reason choose to eschew the religious observance in which they were raised and for which so many have sacrificed. What was once an impossibility in his mind has now become feasible. The friends we keep and the places we visit have a powerful effect on our line of thinking. How circumspect we must be in selecting the appropriate environment and the individuals with whom we share our time. What we believed could never happen – happens more often than we care to admit