

Date: 9 Shevat 5786 (January 27, 2026)

Torah Portion: Beshalach

Topic: Divine Kingship and Orientation in an Unfinished World

The name “YHWH Nissi” (יהוה נִסִּי) appears at a liminal moment in the Exodus narrative (Exod. 17:15), immediately following Yisrael’s first military encounter after liberation and amid evident spiritual fragility. Far from functioning as a triumphalist slogan, this designation articulates a biblical theology of **divine kingship realized through orientation rather than final victory**. The Sages consistently interpret “YHWH Nissi” as a declaration of alignment—ethical, cognitive, and spiritual—within a world where redemption remains incomplete.

Rashi’s commentary on Exodus 17:16 is foundational. Noting the truncated expressions *kes* (“throne”) and *Yah* (a shortened Divine Name), Rashi argues that as long as Amalek exists, the throne and Name of the Holy One are, as it were, incomplete.¹ This reading reframes the battle with Amalek as more than a historical conflict: Amalek represents a force that obstructs the full manifestation of divine sovereignty. Consequently, “YHWH Nissi” does not proclaim closure but signals an **ongoing moral and theological struggle** that extends across generations.

The Talmud reinforces this interpretation by redirecting attention from physical causality to spiritual orientation. Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 3:8 explicitly denies that Mosheh’s raised hands effected victory. Rather, Israel prevailed only when its heart was directed heavenward and subordinated to divine authority.² The banner, therefore, is not a talisman but a pedagogical symbol: it gathers collective consciousness under divine kingship. Amalek’s threat is exposed as fundamentally epistemic—exploiting lapses in attention, memory, and submission to transcendent accountability.

Rambam’s philosophical framework further clarifies the meaning of the banner. In the *Guide for the Perplexed*, he defines the highest religious life as sustained intellectual and ethical orientation toward the knowledge of God.³ From this perspective, “YHWH Nissi” expresses a teleological claim: victory is legitimate only when action is directed toward a moral end grounded in divine wisdom. Amalek, by contrast, embodies moral arbitrariness and power divorced from purpose. Standing beneath the banner of YHWH signifies resistance to ethical drift rather than reliance on miraculous intervention.

Mystical and Hasidic traditions internalize this conflict. The Zohar depicts Amalek as a disruptor of the vertical flow between the upper and lower worlds, a rupture repaired by Mosheh’s elevated posture, which restores cosmic alignment.⁴ Tanya radicalizes this further by identifying Amalek with *kerirut*—spiritual coldness and cynical disengagement that undermines devotion even after revelation.⁵ In this register, “YHWH Nissi” becomes an inward banner, raised against apathy and erosion of covenantal consciousness.

Taken together, these traditions converge on a single theological claim: **divine kingship is real but contested**, and its manifestation depends upon sustained orientation rather than episodic triumph. “YHWH Nissi” names not the end of struggle but the framework within which struggle acquires meaning. To stand beneath this banner is to accept covenantal responsibility in an unfinished world, affirming divine sovereignty through continual ethical, intellectual, and spiritual alignment.

Shalom.

Footnotes

1. **Rashi on Exodus 17:16**, s.v. *ki yad al kes Yah*.
2. **Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 3:8**.
3. **Rambam, Guide for the Perplexed III:51**.
4. **Zohar II, 65b–66a (Beshalach)**.
5. **Tanya, Likutei Amarim ch. 25**.