

So Jeshurun (= Israel) grew fat and kicked –
You grew fat and gross and coarse –
He forsook the God who made him
And spurned the Rock of his support. --- Deut. 31:15

This is like a man with a calf, who fed it well so that it would be able to plow for him. When the calf grew, the man came to place the yoke upon it, and it used its strength to leap away and broke the yoke. --- Sifrei 13

The name **Yeshurun** is related to the word "**Ashurenu**," as in Numb. 24:17: *What I behold will not be soon*. It has to do with seeing, because Israel is the people which saw the glory of the Divine Presence at Sinai, which is alluded to elsewhere in our chapter. Even though they will eventually sin, their having seen the glory will ultimately bring them back. --- Rabbenu Bachya, 14th c.

Yeshurun may come from the word "**yashar**," meaning straight or upright; this is what the Jewish people are supposed to be. --- Ibn Ezra, 12th c.

Or perhaps Israel is called **Yeshurun** because they are named after Jacob, who followed the straight path of the middle way. --- Judah Loew of Prague ("Maharal"), 16th c.

Yeshurun comes from the word "**shirah**," song, because this is the people who after crossing the sea, sang a song of praise to God when they were redeemed from slavery in Egypt. --- Midrash Zuta Song of Songs 1:1

The name **Yeshurun** denotes a higher level for Israel. So why does it appear here, in connection with the failings of the people? It suggests to us that even when the Jewish people are on a high level, when they deserve such praise, they become

proud and overbearing, just as the verse suggests. --- Rabbi Yitzhak Meir of Ger, 19th c.

The word **Yeshurun** comes from the root **yashar**, straight, just, upright. It does not deviate from the high standards demanded by God. However, when the Israelites arrived in the Land of Israel and enjoyed prosperity, they had a downfall.

We also see Yeshurun mentioned twice in **V'Zot HaBracha** which will be read on Simchat Torah. Deut. 33:5: **Vayehi V'Yeshurun Melekh...**, *He became King over Yeshurun when the numbers of the nation gathered; the tribes of Israel in unity.* Deut. 33:26: **Ein K'E-I Yeshurun**, *There is none like God, O Yeshurun; He rides across heaven to help you and His majesty through the upper heights.*

Yeshurun is mentioned as well in Isa. 44:2: ...**Al tira avdi Yaakov v'Yeshurun bacharti vo**, *Fear not my servant Jacob and Yeshurun whom I have chosen.*

In the liturgy for Yom Kippur we find “For you are the Forgiver of Israel and the Pardoner of the tribes of **Yeshurun** in every generation...”

We see from here that even those who are normally straight laced still have the capability to sin. --- Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, 19th c. Germany

The eighteenth-century Eastern European scholar Rabbi Moses Sofer (commonly referred to by the name of his major work, **Chatam Sofer**) once spent time as a house guest of a member of the Rothschild family who was not only a wealthy man but also very pious. Rabbi Eliyahu Safran relates that as Sofer was preparing to leave he was asked by his host, “Please tell me if there is any aspect of my household which is not run according to Torah thought.” And then, to demonstrate his determination to be as pious as possible, he added, “If so, I will immediately rectify the situation.” Sofer pondered for a moment and then replied, “Everything that I see within your household is contrary to Torah thought.” The pious philanthropist nearly collapsed, for he was aghast at this response. Before his response could cause his host any more concern, Sofer smiled and explained the meaning of his seemingly harsh comment based on this week’s Torah reading.

In the poem that comprises the majority of **Parashat Ha'azinu**, Moses predicts that, *Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked*. Rashbam explains that the literary device refers to an animal, who after being fattened by his owner and now secure in his newfound energy and vitality, kicks the very owner who fed him. Similarly, Moses predicts that after the Jewish nation gains material wealth and prosperity, it would then reject the God that had blessed them with their wealth and turn instead to idolatry. This phrase has come to represent the danger of material wealth, and the possibility that once blessed with prosperity a person might grow “fat” and use his wealth for self-gratification and fulfillment. In this light, the **Chatam Sofer** said to Baron Rothschild: “[Moses predicts that] when the Jewish people accrue wealth, they will rebel. Your home, however, is clearly an exception to this prophecy. You have passed the test of plenty. God grant that all those who are prosperous follow your example.” Wealth and prosperity are of course a great blessing, but also presents a spiritual challenge: Does our wealth turn us inward, towards ourselves and our own needs or do we rise to the challenge and use that wealth to not only improve ourselves, but those around us as well?