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## Stories with a Twist [280]

### Did I know that Thieves Would Come? (Insights into Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 109a)



#### Background to Our Story

##### Sodom and Gomorrah

##### Genesis 13:13

<sup>13</sup> Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.

##### Genesis 19:1-29

<sup>1</sup> The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. <sup>2</sup> "My lords," he said, "please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning."

"No," they answered, "we will spend the night in the square."

<sup>3</sup> But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate. <sup>4</sup> Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. <sup>5</sup> They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them."

<sup>6</sup> Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him <sup>7</sup> and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing. <sup>8</sup> Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof."

<sup>9</sup> "Get out of our way," they replied. "This fellow came here as a foreigner, and now he wants to play the judge! We'll treat you worse than them." They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door.

<sup>10</sup> But the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. <sup>11</sup> Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door.

<sup>12</sup> The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here—sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, <sup>13</sup> because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it."

<sup>14</sup> So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry<sup>[a]</sup> his daughters. He said, "Hurry and get out of this place, because the LORD is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought he was joking.

<sup>15</sup> With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished."

<sup>16</sup> When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them. <sup>17</sup> As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!"

<sup>18</sup> But Lot said to them, "No, my lords,<sup>[b]</sup> please! <sup>19</sup> Your<sup>[c]</sup> servant has found favor in your<sup>[d]</sup> eyes, and you<sup>[e]</sup> have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can't flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I'll die. <sup>20</sup> Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it—it is very small, isn't it? Then my life will be spared."

<sup>21</sup> He said to him, "Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you speak of. <sup>22</sup> But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it." (That is why the town was called Zoar.<sup>[f]</sup>)

<sup>23</sup> By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. <sup>24</sup> Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens. <sup>25</sup> Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land. <sup>26</sup> But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

<sup>27</sup> Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the LORD. <sup>28</sup> He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace.

<sup>29</sup> So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.

## Rabbi Yosei



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jose\\_ben\\_Halafta](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jose_ben_Halafta)

Jose ben Halafta or Yose ben Halafta (or *Halpetha*) (Hebrew: רבי יוסי בן חלפתא) was a tanna of the fourth generation (2nd century CE). He is the fifth-most-frequently

mentioned sage in the Mishnah. Of the many Rabbi Yose's in the Talmud, Yose Ben Halafta is the one who is simply referred to as Rabbi Yose.

He was born at [Sepphoris](#); but his family was of [Babylonian-Jewish](#) origin. According to a genealogical chart found at [Jerusalem](#), he was a descendant of [Jonadab ben Rechab](#). He was one of [Rabbi Akiva](#)'s five principal pupils, called "the restorers of the Law," who were afterward ordained by [Judah ben Baba](#). He was also a student of [Johanan ben Nuri](#), whose [halakhot](#) he transmitted and of [Eutolemus](#). It is very likely that he studied much under his father, [Halafta](#), whose authority he invokes in several instances. But his principal teacher was Akiva, whose system he followed in his interpretation of the Law.

After having been ordained in violation of a Roman edict, Jose fled to [Asia Minor](#), where he stayed till the edict was abrogated. Later he settled at [Usha](#), then the seat of the [Sanhedrin](#). As he remained silent when his fellow pupil [Simeon bar Yohai](#) once attacked the Roman government in his presence, he was forced by the Romans to return to Sepphoris, which he found in a decaying state. He established there a flourishing school; and it seems that he died there.

Jose's great learning attracted so many pupils that the words "that which is altogether just shalt thou follow" were interpreted to mean in part "follow Jose to Sepphoris". He was highly extolled after his death. His pupil [Judah ha-Nasi](#) said: "The difference between Jose's generation and ours is like the difference between the Holy of Holies and the most profane."

Owing to Jose's fame as a saint, legend describes him as having met [Elijah](#). Jose, complying with the [levirate law](#), married the wife of his brother who had died childless; she bore him five sons: [Ishmael](#), [Eleazar](#), [Menahem](#), Halafta (who died in his lifetime), and [Eudemus](#).

He exemplified [Abtalion](#)'s dictum, "Love work"; for he was a [tanner](#), a trade then commonly held in contempt.

### **[Zippori \(Sepphoris\)](#)**



<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/vie-zippori>

The city of [Zippori](#) (Sepphoris) is located on a hill in the Lower Galilee, midway between the Mediterranean and Lake Kinneret (Sea of Galilee).

The city dates to the era of the [Maccabees](#) in the second century [B.C.E.](#), when it was founded by Alexander Janneus of the Hasmonean dynasty.

Zippori was described by the first century C.E. Jewish historian, Josephus Flavius, as "the ornament of all Galilee." The city may get its name from the Hebrew word "*tsipor*" (bird) because the view from the town gives a sense of flying.

[Zippori](#) is mentioned in many Jewish sources of the first centuries of the common era. Founded in the [Hellenistic](#) era by Alexander Janneus, it was captured by the Romans in 37 B.C.E. when the inhabitants fled in the midst of a snowstorm. A rebellion against Herod's control of [Zippori](#) was suppressed and the King's son, Herod Antipas rebuilt the city and renamed it Autocratoris. The Roman governor, Gabinius, later made Zippori the administrative capital of Galilee in the mid-first century B.C.E.

The Jews did not join the [revolt against Rome](#) in 66 C.E.; instead, they opened the city gates to the legions of the Roman Emperor Vespasian and surrendered. On coins minted in [Zippori](#) at that time, the city is named Eirenopolis, "city of peace." Later, its name was changed to Diocaesarea in honor of Zeus and the emperor.

The Jewish community grew when thousands of refugees from Judea moved to towns in the Galilee following the [Bar-Kokhba](#) revolt of 135 and Zippori became the center of Jewish religious and spiritual life in the Land of Israel. Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi, who compiled the [Mishnah](#), lived in the city for 17 years and relocated the [Sanhedrin](#) (the supreme Jewish religious and judicial body he headed) to [Zippori](#) in the third century. At least 18 [synagogues](#) were functioning in the city around this time and Jews constituted the majority of the town's population.

Even after the seat of the Sanhedrin was moved to [Tiberias](#), [Zippori](#) remained a center of Bible study and notable sages taught in its numerous academies. Also, its location on or near major trade routes in the lower Galilee, made [Zippori](#) a prime market for traders.

The discovery of rich, figurative mosaics during excavations at [Zippori](#) provide evidence of the Roman character of the city's pagan population, which coexisted in harmony with the Jews during the period of economic prosperity in the late [Roman period](#). [Zippori](#) was destroyed in 363 by an earthquake, but was rebuilt soon thereafter, retaining its social and spiritual centrality in Jewish life in the Galilee.

The city is also the traditional birthplace of Mary and just four miles of [Nazareth](#), the home of Jesus. During [Byzantine](#) times, the Christian community in [Zippori](#) grew considerably. This growth was accompanied by the construction of many churches and by Christian involvement in municipal matters. It became the seat of a Christian bishopric in the 5th century CE. Following the [Arab conquest](#) in the mid-seventh century, the city declined.

Under [Crusader](#) rule during the 12th century, a small watchtower and a church (dedicated to Anne and Joachim, parents of Mary, mother of Jesus) were built on the city's hilltop. The remains of the watchtower, partly renovated in later times, still dominates the hilltop today.

Since 1990, large areas of [Zippori](#) have been [excavated](#). The finds have included public buildings and baths, residential areas, an amphitheater, market building, industrial installations, *mikvot*, cisterns, a complex drainage system and a great deal of [glass](#). Of particular interest are the ruins of a 4,500-seat Roman amphitheater and a mosaic inside a villa that has the depiction of a beautiful young woman that is referred to as the "Mona Lisa of the Galilee." Archaeologists also discovered the narrowest ancient synagogue in Israel, measuring only about 68 feet (20.7 m.) long and 27 feet (8 m.) wide, which has a beautiful mosaic floor decorated with a zodiac and pictures of Temple objects and Biblical scenes.



[Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Sanhedrin Volume 2. Koren publishers Jerusalem Page 387](#)

Balsam – [אֶפְרָסִמוֹן](#): According to many scholars, the *tzori* that is mentioned in the Torah is identified as balsam, particularly the Arabian balsam tree, *Commiphora opobalsamum*, which reaches 3–5 m in height. The tree has extremely thin branches, complex leaves, and small white flowers.

The highest quality balsamic perfume is sap that drips in small amounts from the ends of the stems, but the perfume is generally extracted by boiling the branches. After a certain period of time, the balsam sap evaporates, leaving a sticky residue. This residue was used for medicinal purposes in addition to its use as incense and as fragrant oil.

During the Second Temple period, the finest balsam grew in the Jordan Valley. It was so highly valued that it was literally worth its weight in gold.

## The Text: Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 109a

תנו רבנן: "אנשי סדום אין להן חלק לעולם הבא שנאמר: 'ואנשי סדם רעים וחטאים לה' מאד'. 'רעים' – בעולם הזה. 'וחטאים' – לעולם הבא".

דרש רבא: מאי דכתיב: "חתר בחשך בתיים יומם חתמו למו לא ידעו אור"? מלמד שהיו נותנים עיניהם בבעלי ממון, ומפקידים אצלו אפרסמון, ומניחים אותו בבית גנניהם. לערב באים ומריחין אותו ככלב, שנאמר: "ישבו לערב יהמו ככלב ויסובבו עיר". ובאים וחותרים שם ונוטלין אותו ממון. "ערום ילינו מבלי לבוש ואין כסות בקרה", "חמור ותומים ינהגו יחבלו שור אלמנה", "גבלות ישיגו, עדר גזלו וירעו", "והוא לקברות יובל ועל גדיש ישקוד".

דרש רבי יוסי בציפורי. אחתרין ההיא ליליא תלת מאה מחתרתא בציפורי. אתו וקא מצערי ליה, אמרו ליה: "יהבית אורחיה לגנבי". אמר להו: "מי הוה ידענא דאתו גנבי?"

The Sages taught: The people of Sodom have no share in the World-to-Come, as it is stated: "*And the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly*" (Genesis 13:13). "Wicked" indicates in this world; "and sinners" indicates for the World-to-Come.

...

Rava taught: What is the meaning of that which is written: "*In the dark they dig through houses; by day they shut themselves up; they know not the light*" (Job 24:16)? This teaches that they [the people of Sodom] would set their sights on property owners. They would take one and they would give him balsam, whose smell diffuses, and the property owner would place it in his treasury.

In the evening, the people of Sodom would come and sniff it out like a dog and discover the location of the property owner's treasury, as it is stated: "*They return at evening; they howl like a dog, and go round about the city*" (Psalms 59:7). And after discovering the location they would come and dig there, and they would take that property.

...

Rabbi Yosei taught in Tzipori the methods of theft employed in Sodom.

That night three hundred tunnels were excavated in Tzipori.

Homeowners came and harassed him [Rabbi Yosei]; they said to him: You have given a way for thieves to steal.

Rabbi Yosei said to them: Did I know that thieves would come as a result of my lecture?



**Explaining the Story** - What is going on in our story? (Explain the sequence of events)

### Comprehension and Analysis Questions

**?** What was the *modus operandi* of the people of Sodom?

**Bonus ?** If balsam is an expensive item, why did the people of Sodom give it to homeowners? Why did the homeowners accept it?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

**?** Why did the homeowner place the balsam in his treasury?

**?** Why did Rabbi Yosei teach the methods of theft employed in Sodom?

**?** Why were three hundred tunnels excavated in Tzipori the night following Rabbi Yosei's lecture?

**?** Why were the homeowners upset with Rabbi Yosei?

**Extra Bonus ?** Why did thieves burrow under the homes in Tzipori to steal? (Hint: there is only one answer)

### "The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from These Texts



Who is to be blamed for the theft? The thief!



Our story is about the evil people of Sodom and about the thieves in Tzipori, but it is also about the attempt of the homeowners to shift the blame for their misfortune from the thieves to Rabbi Yosei. Truth be told, we are all subject to a variety of influences and circumstances throughout our lives. However, our story teaches us that at the end of the day, each of us is responsible for our own actions. Excusing our poor behavior and choices by blaming parents, teachers, and preachers, not only is wrong from an ethical point of view, but also is ineffective as far as it hinders our opportunities to change.

### **On responsibility and Choices**

*"In the long run, we shape our lives, and we shape ourselves. The process never ends until we die. And the choices we make are ultimately our own responsibility." — Eleanor Roosevelt*

"All blame is a waste of time. No matter how much fault you find with another, and regardless of how much you blame him, it will not change you."  
— Wayne Dyer

"You must take personal responsibility. You cannot change the circumstances, the seasons, or the wind, but you can change yourself." — Jim Rohn

"The reason people blame things on the previous generation is that there's only one other choice." — Doug Larson

"In the old days, words like sin and Satan had a moral certitude. Today, they're replaced with self-help jargon, words like dysfunction and antisocial behavior, discouraging any responsibility for one's actions." — Don Henley

# West Side Story - Gee Officer Krupke! (1961)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7TT4jnnWys>

(My Appreciation to Greg and Deborah Arluck for making the connection)



## ACTION

Dear kindly Sergeant Krupke,  
You gotta understand,  
It's just our bringin' up-ke  
That gets us out of hand.  
Our mothers all are junkies,  
Our fathers all are drunks.  
Golly Moses, natcherly we're punks!

## ACTION AND JETS

Gee, Officer Krupke, we're very upset;  
We never had the love that ev'ry child oughta get.  
We ain't no delinquents,  
We're misunderstood.  
Deep down inside us there is good!

## ACTION

There is good!

## ALL

There is good, there is good,  
There is untapped good!  
Like inside, the worst of us is good!

SNOWBOY: (Spoken) That's a touchin' good story.

ACTION: (Spoken) Lemme tell it to the world!

SNOWBOY: Just tell it to the judge.

## ACTION

Dear kindly Judge, your Honor,  
My parents treat me rough.  
With all their marijuana,  
They won't give me a puff.  
They didn't wanna have me,  
But somehow I was had.  
Leapin' lizards! That's why I'm so bad!

DIESEL: (As Judge) Right!

Officer Krupke, you're really a square;  
This boy don't need a judge, he needs an analyst's care!  
It's just his neurosis that oughta be curbed.  
He's psychologic'ly disturbed!

ACTION  
I'm disturbed!

JETS  
We're disturbed, we're disturbed,  
We're the most disturbed,  
Like we're psychologic'ly disturbed.

DIESEL: (Spoken, as Judge) In the opinion on this court,  
this child is depraved on account he ain't had a normal home.

ACTION: (Spoken) Hey, I'm depraved on account I'm deprived.

DIESEL: So take him to a headshrinker.

ACTION (Sings)  
My father is a bastard,  
My ma's an S.O.B.  
My grandpa's always plastered,  
My grandma pushes tea.  
My sister wears a mustache,  
My brother wears a dress.  
Goodness gracious, that's why I'm a mess!

A-RAB: (As Psychiatrist) Yes!  
Officer Krupke, you're really a slob.  
This boy don't need a doctor, just a good honest job.  
Society's played him a terrible trick,  
And sociologic'ly he's sick!

ACTION  
I am sick!

ALL  
We are sick, we are sick,  
We are sick, sick, sick,  
Like we're sociologically sick!

A-RAB: In my opinion, this child don't need to have his head shrunk at all.  
Juvenile delinquency is purely a social disease!

ACTION: Hey, I got a social disease!

A-RAB: So take him to a social worker!

ACTION

Dear kindly social worker,  
They say go earn a buck.  
Like be a soda jerker,  
Which means like be a schumck.  
It's not I'm anti-social,  
I'm only anti-work.  
Gloryosky! That's why I'm a jerk!

BABY JOHN: (As Female Social Worker)

Eek!  
Officer Krupke, you've done it again.  
This boy don't need a job, he needs a year in the pen.  
It ain't just a question of misunderstood;  
Deep down inside him, he's no good!

ACTION

I'm no good!

ALL

We're no good, we're no good!  
We're no earthly good,  
Like the best of us is no damn good!

DIESEL (As Judge)

The trouble is he's crazy.

A-RAB (As Psychiatrist)

The trouble is he drinks.

BABY JOHN (As Female Social Worker)

The trouble is he's lazy.

DIESEL

The trouble is he stinks.

A-RAB

The trouble is he's growing.

BABY JOHN

The trouble is he's grown.

ALL

Krupke, we got troubles of our own!

Gee, Officer Krupke,  
We're down on our knees,  
'Cause no one wants a fellow with a social disease.  
Gee, Officer Krupke,  
What are we to do?  
Gee, Officer Krupke,  
Krup you!