

The RYS Daily 9/14/06 The Way Not to Say Selichos

Given that Ashkenazim begin saying Selichos this Sunday, I think that the piece below is particularly apropos at this time of year. Yitzchok Levine

From pages 215 to 216 of the Mussar Movement, Volume 1, Part 2.

He would point to many such object lessons [where people harm others while doing a mitzvah] in every day life:

It is customary at the end of the month of Elul and during the Ten Days of Penitence to rise in the middle of the night or very early in the morning for the Selichot services. In their eagerness to perform the mitzvah, people commit many misdeeds. It is not infrequent for an energetic individual to make so much noise in rising from bed that he wakes his entire household and even the neighbors. Sometimes there are sick people or infants in the vicinity, and his behavior causes them pain and suffering. One individual might even have the housemaid rise and make tea for him. In most cases, she is a widow or orphan, and so he transgresses the prohibition, "You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child." In his haste he pours dirty water in a place where people pass by, and so he sets an obstacle in a public domain.

When he enters the synagogue; he might discover that his lectern has been moved from its place. He reprimands the shamash, and in this instance he is guilty of slander and publicly shaming his neighbor. Sometimes the one who has moved his lectern is a full-time student who has been awake all night engrossed in Torah study, and the owner now inflicts grief and humiliation upon a Talmid Chacham. And so R. Israel enumerated seven grave transgressions one is liable to commit in this instance, yet remain sublimely unaware of having done anything wrong and derive smug self-satisfaction from his fervent prayer and sincere repentance, blissfully unconscious that his loss outweighs his gain.