

Cursed is the man who makes a graven or molten image... and sets it up in secret. (27:15)

Hypocrisy is a moral failing, which, upon being added to sinful behavior, makes the act even more repugnant, thus deserving of a curse. The Torah enumerates a group of sins which, as a rule, elude the attention of human courts of justice. These sins, upon which the added curse has been placed, are of a kind that remains covert due to their nature. **Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl**, observes that the Torah adds the word *ba'seisar*, in secret, in the beginning and end of the series of curses, to emphasize that it is especially the undisclosed character of these particular offenses which makes them deserving of a curse. Therefore, the curse affects particularly those who practice moral and social abominations beneath the cloak of outward respectability. The hypocrisy added to the actual sin singles out these transgressions for special punitive consideration.

Included in the series of sins is the *makeih rei'eihu baseiser*, one who strikes down his neighbor in secret. This refers to the *baal lashon hora*, slanderer, who strikes down his neighbor without the latter being aware of it or knowing from where the blow originates. The slanderer is beyond the reach of human justice, but his foul mouth victimizes people no less. He destroys the happiness, peace of mind and personal dignity of his victim. What is worse is that this offense is habit forming and plays itself out, day and night, without respect for anything. Indeed, *lashon hora* can even – and often is – spoken within the hallowed sanctuaries of the *shul* and *bais hamedrash*.

Rav Hirsch notes that the form of the word used to describe the slanderer is not the verb, which could mean a one-time offense, but rather, *makeih*, which denotes a “striker,” an epithet which would apply to one to whom scandal-mongering has become a way of life, a habit – indeed, part of his character. Thus, the Torah's curse applies, not to the isolated situation in which one loses it and – out of anger – says something inappropriate about his neighbor. No – the Torah refers to the habitual slanderer – the *baal lashon hora*, the one for whom scandal-mongering and defaming another person's character is for him second nature. Such a person is not cursed by Hashem. In fact, he curses himself. Yes, he is an accursed person.