

Now Yosef could not restrain himself in the presence of all who stood before him. (45:1)

Rashi explains that Yosef could not allow the Egyptians to be present when he was putting his brothers to shame. The *Midrash* goes further, claiming that Yosef had placed himself in great danger, for if his brothers had decided to kill him, no one would have known one way or the other. He said, "Better I should be killed than I should humiliate my brothers in front of the Egyptians." Embarrassing someone is an egregious sin for which one loses his portion in *Olam Habba*, the World to Come. *Ish L'reieihu* quotes **Horav Yosef Chaim Blau, Shlita**, *Rav* of Ashkelon, who adds another rationale to explain Yosef's willingness to sacrifice his life rather than shame his brothers in public. Yosef sought to atone for his earlier sins as a youth, when he had tattled on his brothers. The message he was conveying to his father was that his brothers were up to no good. This caused them great embarrassment. Thus, he wanted to repair his earlier indiscretion by preventing his brothers' shame.

The following story is told concerning **Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl**. He was attending a conference of *gedolei Yisrael*, the most prominent rabbinic leaders of the time. During the course of the conference an issue arose which required a special subcommittee, to be comprised of a select group of whom we might call the "executive leadership." As is often the case, there is the general membership and, exclusive of them, are the executives, the movers and shakers, who are the individuals that establish policy and make the decisions on which everybody else "votes."

The conference chairman announced that the next meeting was to be attended by a select group of rabbis, to whom an invitation had been extended and whose attendance was crucial to the meeting. The chairman was acutely aware that if the meeting were to be opened up to the entire assembly nothing would be accomplished. It was not as if the other rabbinic leaders were less distinguished, it was just impractical to invite everyone – only a select few. The problem was: no one was leaving the room.

The chairman once again announced that the meeting was only for those who had received prior invitations. Again, no one budged. This time the chairman became indignant and announced that, if necessary, he would have those who did not have invitations physically removed from the room. Still no one moved from their seats. Finally, the entire room stood in shock as *Rav* Elchanan rose from his seat and shuffled out of the room. When he did this, he was soon followed by a number of leaders who "also" did not have invitations. What happened? *Rav* Elchanan realized that it was embarrassing for some of the rabbinic leaders to get up and concede that they had not been included among the movers and shakers. When they saw *Rav* Elchanan Wasserman, one of the undisputed *gedolei hador*, leaving the room they also left. They did not know, however, that the venerable *gaon* returned by a back door. He was not going to allow anyone to feel ashamed, so he also walked out. Once he left, it was no longer embarrassing to leave. Greatness is defined not by the respect one receives, but by the respect one gives.