

**Good Shabbos Everyone.** The Mishna teaches us: "Jealously, desires and honor-seeking remove a man from this world." (Avos 4:28) The Torah this week tells us about Korach, an individual whose honor seeking removed him from the world. Rashi explains this week that Korach was upset that Moshe appointed Korach's younger cousin Elitzafan ben Uziel as the leader of the family of Kehas, instead of Korach. The commentary Orchos Tzaddikim explains that Korach wanted for himself honor and greatness which had not been conferred upon him by Hashem. (P.33, The Gate of Pride, Edit., Reb G. Zaloshinsky, Transl., Reb S. Silverstein) When Korach failed to receive the honor he felt he deserved, Korach attempted to stage a revolt against Moshe. We see how Korach's search for honor eventually caused his own death and the death of others who supported him. The following true story and interview demonstrates how one person chose a life of meaning instead of seeking honor.

Yoseph Robinson, who was born in Jamaica, came to Brooklyn when he was twelve, and dropped out of school shortly thereafter. As a teenager, he moved to Philadelphia and became involved in a life of illicit street activities. In his early twenties and after a close brush with death, during which he was targeted by a rival Jamaican gang, Yoseph relocated to Los Angeles and set his sights on the Hollywood music scene. He became a Hip-Hop promoter and producer, and signed a lucrative album contract with Universal/Bungalow Records. At the height of his musical success and while indulging in all the material abundance Hollywood had to offer, Yoseph chanced upon a Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch edition of the Chumash.

Yoseph's life was transformed. He decided to reject the emptiness and egotism of the Hollywood lifestyle and embrace Yiddishkeit. Yoseph converted to Judaism and now lives in Brooklyn as an Orthodox Jew. The following are excerpts from a recent interview with Yoseph. Question: What was your first experience with Judaism? Robinson: Interestingly, my first "experience" with Judaism or with Jewish people did not resonate with me at all. When my parents came to the United States my mother worked for a lovely Jewish family called the Schwimmers. My mother even kept a picture of the Schwimmer family on the mantelpiece in our home. I saw that picture almost every day of my childhood. In fact, my siblings and I were able to come to the U.S. only because the Schwimmers generously agreed to sponsor my family. The funny thing is, though, the Schwimmers being "Jewish" was simply descriptive, like saying the Schwimmers were Asian, or Puerto Rican. Jewishness or Judaism had no intrinsic or latent meaning for me.

My second contact with Judaism occurred when I was thirteen years old, a few months after I arrived in the U.S. I worked as a delivery boy for a kosher grocery store in Brooklyn. Since growing up in Jamaica was a unique cultural experience untainted with racial or religious prejudice, I had formed no previous conceptions about Jews. As a result, the kosher grocery experience left no impression on me one way or the other. It was only when I randomly walked into a bookstore asking for a bible and received a [Hirsch English edition of the Chumash](#) instead that I began my fundamental connection to Yiddishkeit.

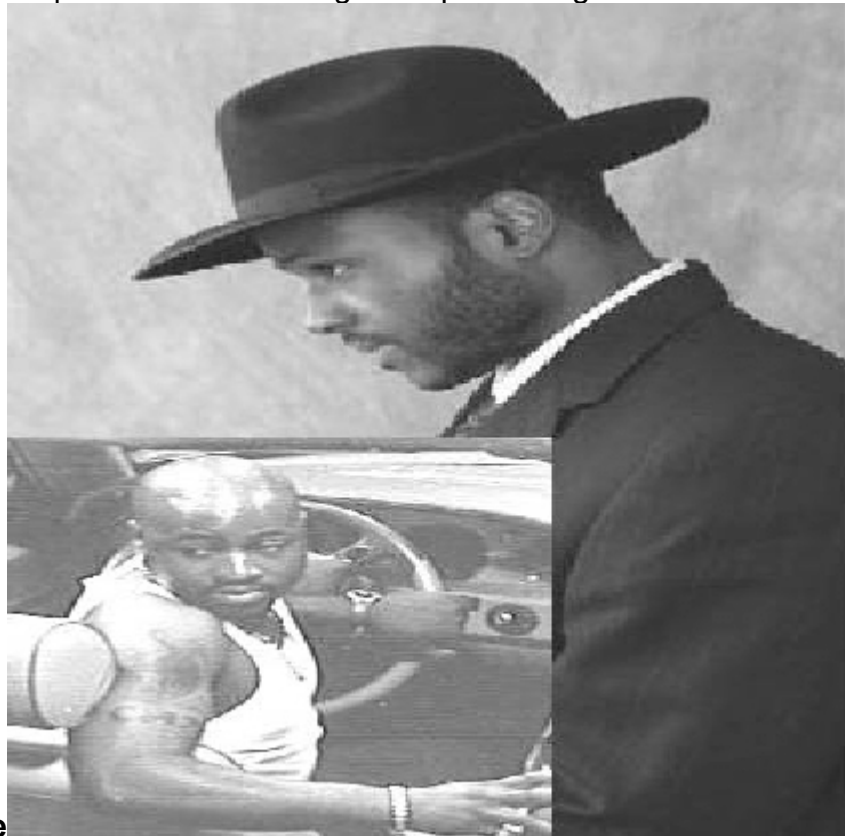
Question: Who performed your conversion, and what were the requirements? The Los Angeles beis din, under the leadership of Rabbi Tzvi Block and Rabbi Aharon Tandler, converted me. My geirus (conversion) studies program took about two and a half years to complete, and centered on the weekly parshah, the halachos of Shabbos and kashrus, and the taryag (613) mitzvos. Question: How did friends and family members react? When I decided to convert, my friends thought I went off the deep end, and my family tended to agree with them. After realizing that my decision was a serious, lifelong commitment, however, I did garner the respect of those closest to me. Question: What is your current study schedule like? I have a chavrusah with whom I learn Mishnah Berurah, I learn parshah and mussar almost daily, and I have begun venturing into the mighty sea of Talmud. Question: How would you characterize your treatment and degree of acceptance by the frum community in Brooklyn? For the most part, I must say, my experience has been overwhelmingly positive. Many people have opened their homes and their hearts to me, and have treated me like members of their own family. These new lifelong friends are a true credit to Yiddishkeit, and beautifully fulfill the mitzvah of v'ahavtem es ha'ger. (you shall love the convert) As in every community, however, there are biases that persist. I do get stares and occasionally hear some thoughtless comments, but I choose to focus on the positive. Question: Are you in touch with other black geirim (converts)? Interestingly, as time goes on, I have been privileged to meet many fascinating geirim (converts) of both genders and of many nationalities and ethnicities.

Question: Has their experience with Orthodox Judaism been similar to your own? By and large, their experience has been heartwarming and enriching. But they do voice some concerns of bias and unequal treatment. I certainly feel that some change or improvement needs to be made in this arena. Question: What kind of change are you referring to, and how do you expect this change to occur? I feel that changes are necessary to allow a Yid such as myself, who happens to be dark-skinned, to feel secure and equally represented under the banner of Klal Yisrael. This kind of change can only come about when a community joins the effort. Without meaning to sound didactic, I feel that social change or justice will not come about through legislative bodies. It will come from ordinary people like you and me. It all starts with honest and open dialogue.

Question: What is your message to potential geirim (converts) of any color or background? My message to geirim (converts) is that if one is seeking spirituality, Judaism, practiced correctly, is the ideal vehicle for achieving that aim. I personally find it meaningful and fulfilling but, once you come aboard, keep in mind that while the Torah is flawless, people are not. Question: What do you hope to accomplish with the publication of your book? I hope my book will appeal to people on multiple levels. In the U.S. there exists a fascination and mystique that surrounds all things Jamaican. In addition, my memoir provides an insider's look into the dark side of drug running, which will ignite the imagination of a widespread American demographic. My first-hand accounts of the Hollywood music scene and celebrity lifestyles will leave readers thirsting for more tantalizing details. Finally, my decision to convert to Judaism leaves people simultaneously baffled and intrigued. I have infused my spiritual journey with a humor, intelligence, and wit that will also capture the curiosity of the sophisticated, high-end reader. In short, I hope to entertain, enlighten – and inspire as well.

Question: What's next for you while you're working to get your book published? Well, hopefully I'll be able to talk with the President "brother to brother," asking him to let my people be. In all seriousness, though, I'm just striving to grow spiritually and, im Yirtzeh Hashem, hope to be discussing the success of the book with you in the near future!

We can be inspired by Yoseph's example to seek knowledge and personal growth instead of fame



and fortune. **Good Shabbos Everyone**