Occupy Mesopotamia!

*Elective 1*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **AUTHOR(S):** | Jon Adam Ross |
| **SUMMARY:** | You want to speak truth to power? You have something to say about the system? You’re in the mood to protest? You’re not the first. Come to this workshop to tweet, scream, and run around. You will also learn how stories in the Torah can trigger a conversation about protest with campers and staff. *– Submitted by Jon Adam Ross*  \*This workshop involves aerobic movement\* |
| **TOPIC(S):** | Jewish Text, Social Justice |
| **LEARNING OBJECTIVE:** | Participants will have strong familiarity with the story of Korach in the Torah and glancing familiarity with other narratives of protest in the Torah and will have engaged in a conversation about protest and what we can learn about how protest is depicted in the Torah. |
| **AUDIENCE:** | Middle School, High School, Adults; anywhere from 12 to 40 participants. |
| **TIMING:** | 60 minutes |
| **APPENDICES:** | The following texts (all attached as appendices):  Numbers 16:1 - 18:32 |
| **MATERIALS NEEDED:** | * A ½ poster board size poster board (or cut flipchart paper) for each participant * Markers (at least one for each participant - NO YELLOW) * A stack of Dixie cups (one for each participant) * 2 bottles of water * Cut slips of paper (big enough to write a tweet on, like cutting a regular sheet into 4, enough for a slip for everyone) * Pens for each participant (different from the markers) * Speaker to plug in smartphone or laptop |
| **SET-UP DETAILS:** | A wide open room (with walls) with no furniture  No other setup needed |

**Session Timeline & Outline:**

* The workshop will begin by having everyone walk around the space, decorated with photographs of protest from around the world. Protest songs will be playing through the sound system. Everyone will be asked to stand next to the photo that most represents the answer to the question: “What kind of protestor are you?”
* Once everyone has stood by a picture, they will be asked to remove their shoes and leave them by the picture and find a seat in a circle on the floor altogether.
* The workshop facilitator will explain to everyone that this will be a physical workshop and that they are safe in the space. Script: “This will be a physically intense workshop. If at any time you need to remove yourself to catch your breath, please feel free. Then you can jump back in when you’re ready.” The workshop facilitator will then ask everyone to lie down.
* The facilitator will lead the participants through a guided meditation that puts them in role as Korach. The facilitator will paint a rosy picture of wealthy luxury. Korach is carried through the desert – he’s not a walker. The equivalent of having a chauffeur. The goal is to get the participants to relax each limb, to feel totally at ease, and then to take it all away – pulling the rug out from under the participants by waking them up and arousing them to the reality around them.
* The facilitator will wake everyone up with harsh commands to move out of the way because this land is now being dedicated for private use by the Levites for priestly duties and no one is allowed to nap here. And when the participants stand up and make their way to the exterior of the space, the facilitator will command them to begin walking. A heavy walk with 40 years of goods and supplies taken from Egyptians after the escape/exodus.
* After a few minutes of guided quick heavy walking, the participants will be invited to come to the middle for a drink of water. But there will only be one cup of water for all participants to share. The facilitator will inform the group that the rest of the water is being used by the Levites to wash the blood off the tabernacle. Also – for Moses to drink. Also – to wash Aaron’s clothes since the high priest must be dressed in pristine white for service to Hashem. Then they should be directed to heavy walk again around the space. This time they’re pulling animals with them, animals they have raised from birth. Animals whose milk sustains their children and whose fur coats have been shorn and used to make coats and blankets to warm everyone in the cold winter night. Now it’s time for a cold desert night.
* Invite everyone to lie down and rest. Close their eyes. Meditate them to sleep, but remind them how cold they are and how the animal skins are the only thing keeping them warm. In their sleep guide them on a dream about how all their animals have been taken away for the sake of sacrifices to Hashem. Lay it on thick – the animals, your livelihood – gone for the service of god.
* The facilitator should then wake the participants up; get them heavy walking again in the heat of the desert with all their luggage. Except now, with no animals to bear the burden, there’s even more to carry. And now command the participants to hustle to the front of the line, to see the Tabernacle in person, to get a glimpse of what’s happening with the animals. Hustle them until they sweat, and then announce that they are watching as Levites are barbecuing the goats and sheep. And they’re smiling and laughing. 9% of the people are suffering as wanderers in this desert. At least in Egypt we had food to eat. And the Levites are sitting pretty? Who made them so special? Why can’t everyone else share in their bounty?
* It’s time Moses and Aaron heard from the 99%. If you have a comment as you are marching, there are slips of paper and pens strewn about. Write your statement, but it must be under 140 characters. Please bring it up to the facilitator – the voice leading you through the desert, the cloud of day and fire of night. (Keep them walking another few minutes before getting to the next phase.)
* At this point, lead the participants to an area where cardboard posters and markers have been set out. It’s time to make signs for the protest. That’s right – there’s gonna be a protest. You didn’t think there’d be a session called “Occupy Mesopotamia!” without a protest, did you?
* Once the signs are made, encourage everyone to gather together and hold up their signs and let their voices be heard. Chanting. Louder. Stronger!
* After a minute or two, the facilitator should let everyone have a break…take a nap. Get everyone to lie down and meditate them into relaxation but now, it’s characterless. This will be a transition moment. As they are down put them to sleep. When they wake up they are no longer Korach. They are Moses.
* The facilitator should invite everyone to stand. You are 100 years old. You are carrying nothing, but the weight on your shoulders feels heavier than any luggage could. You have a voice in your head – a holy voice – that is constantly speaking to you, giving you direction. But you are distracted, you can’t focus on that voice because of the swell of protests clamoring outside your tent. What are they protesting? Is it you? Is it god? You have to face them. You are the boss. You are in charge of making the law and keeping the order. Sometimes you hate your job, in part because someone always hates you for doing your job. You can’t please all the people all the time. Who’s unhappy now? You make your way out to see the person at the head of the protests. It’s someone you know, your cousin, in fact. Korach, the rich man. Korach, the selfish loudmouth. Korach, the idiot. He had roused up people to speak out against your leadership, against what he terms as the 1%. Walk around Moses, look at all the people. Listen to their shouting. For days now there have been protests. *(Describe the protests in detail, including the use of incense in trays brought before god for approval).*
* The facilitator will now narrate the opening up of the earth and the swallowing of Korach and his followers. Close your eyes Moses. Hear how their screams of protest have become screams of death. Cover your eyes Moses. Block out the sight of God’s wrath. And now silence Moses. Keep your eyes covered Moses. Silence. No more protests Moses. Now listen Moses. Shema. Shema. Listen. Shema.
* The facilitator will then invite everyone to find a piece of paper and sit down somewhere with a pen and write whatever comes to their mind.
* After a few minutes of writing they all will come back to the circle and answer the following debrief questions:
  + Offer one word for how you feel right now.
  + What just happened?
  + What other stories of protest do you know from the Torah? How are they different from the story we just experienced?
  + What do you think the story of Korach teaches us or doesn’t teach us about protest?
  + In what ways might protest come up at camp and/or be useful to bring up at camp?