

# The 21 Jump Street

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Source: <http://wolkin.com/2012/04/1632/its-passover-son/>

I call this exercise [The 21 Jump Street](#). It's a reference to the poker game that the characters play in the opening sequence of the show, but that's mostly me having fun with outdated cultural references. The title is less relevant than the exercise itself.

**Materials:** All you need are people, Post-It notes, pens/pencils and comfort with a writing exercise at your Seder.

**The Context:** At the Seder, we celebrate our ancestors' liberation from slavery in Egypt. Putting aside the debate about the historicity of that particular narrative, it is an essential part of the Jewish Story. One of the most important pieces of the Seder is that we are asked to step into the shoes and/or sandals of our ancestors and view ourselves as if we were also slaves in Egypt. The challenge in our modern lives is that most of us cannot truly relate to this type of experience. We do, however recognize that we have brothers and sisters in this world whose history sadly remains too close to this experience, and we must also recognize that there are those in this world who are in fact living as slaves. I strongly encourage you to incorporate a conversation about [fair labor and human trafficking](#) into your Seder, and we should both pray and work towards a time when all people can only think of slavery as a memory as opposed to something that still exists in today's world.

However, the purpose of this exercise is address the idea that we all have some version of personal bondage, something that holds us back from being the people that we would fully and truly like to become. Let me add that I do not intend to diminish actual slavery with this -the goal here is to create a different type of personal connection with the Passover experience.

**The Exercise:** Explain the notion of personal bondage, as I described it above. We all have something (or many things) in our lives from which we struggle to free ourselves. Perhaps it's an addiction of some sort, or over-commitment to our work lives over our personal lives. Everyone's got something. Pass a Post-It note to everyone at your Seder, and ask them to write that challenge in a word or two. Wait until everyone is ready, and ask them to stick their notes to their foreheads at the same time. Ask the group look around at what everyone has written.

Ask folks to raise their hands if they see at least one other note that they can relate to (hint: everyone will always raise their hands).

It's a common experience. We all have those things that we wish we could change, that hold us back just a little bit. We want to be freed of them. All too often, we convince ourselves that we're alone in these struggles, but through making ourselves vulnerable with a bit of communal disclosure, we discover that nothing could be further from the truth.

It's not always easy to do so, but at the Passover Seder, we can create a moment where we symbolically try to let those things go. And sometimes we can use that as an opportunity to start fresh.

Close the activity by placing a bowl in the center of the table, do any one of the following:

- Ask each person to free themselves just for tonight by tearing up their Post-Its and placing them into the bowl.
- As an alternative, you can have people tear up the notes of others instead.
- A guest at a Seder of mine a couple years back pushed back against this framing and proposed a

variation that I love: he said that we don't have to reject or ignore our struggles, but that instead we can embrace them as a part of our whole selves. He then lovingly moved his note over his heart and kept it there for the rest of the evening.

Leave the bowl at the table as a reminder of those little struggles in our lives and the intention to move past them.

Or you can pour wine on them or something like that. It's totally up to you.