Nine Books You Should Read to Think About Love, Relationships, and Commitment



I Read This Over Shabbos is a weekly newsletter from Rivka Bennun Kay about Jewish book culture, book recommendations, and modern ideas. Receive this free newsletter every week in your inbox by subscribing here. Questions, comments, or feedback? Email Rivka at Shabbosreads@18forty.org.

My husband and I are about to celebrate one year of marriage.

In a year that felt like it fluttered by quickly, I became a learner—and it wasn't because I was in kollel. I learned, day in and day out, how to be a partner. I learned about humility, listening with care, how every conversation has a place and time. Partnership is a reflection of humanity; it may be good, but it can't be perfect.

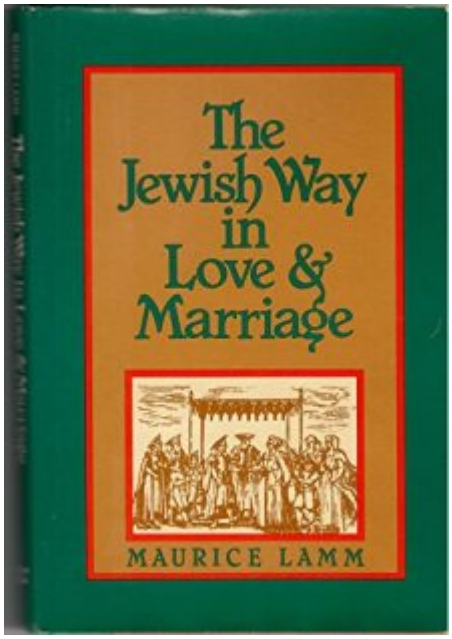
Love and marriage are not simple, but with investment and dedication, they make us better people. In honor of Tu B'Av yesterday, 18Forty is exploring love, romance, and commitment. How do we learn to love? How do we build relationships that are happy, healthy, and fulfilling? And why is it so universally difficult to find love that can endure?

This booklist explores these questions and more. I'd love to hear if you pick one up, or if you have other books on love and commitment that you would recommend.

On Judaism and love:

The Jewish Way in Love and Marriage by Maurice Lamm

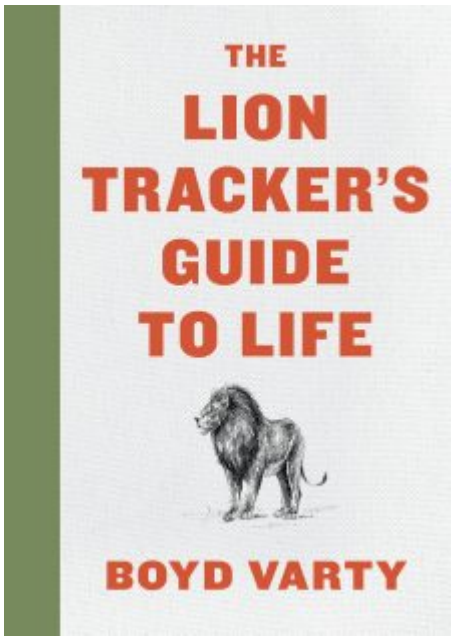
A cultural touchstone, this work presents a traditional guide to the Jewish views of love and marriage in Jewish law and life.



On learning what's deeply important to us:

The Lion Tracker's Guide to Life by Boyd Varty

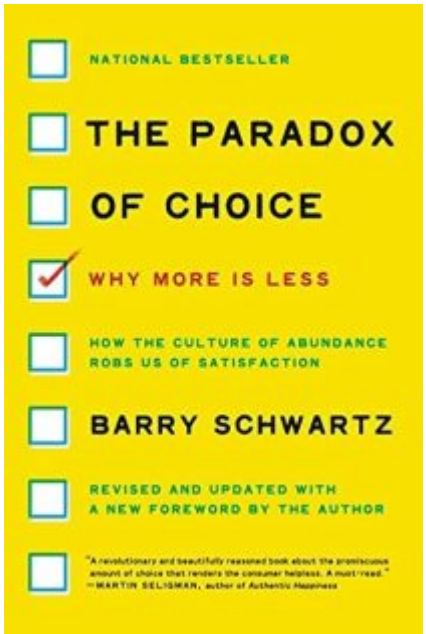
This recommendation by previous 18Forty guest Channah Cohen explores the ancient art of lion tracking as a metaphor for following your inner purpose, teaching that following one's inner track fosters a state of "greater aliveness."



On making very important decisions:

The Paradox of Choice by Barry Schwartz

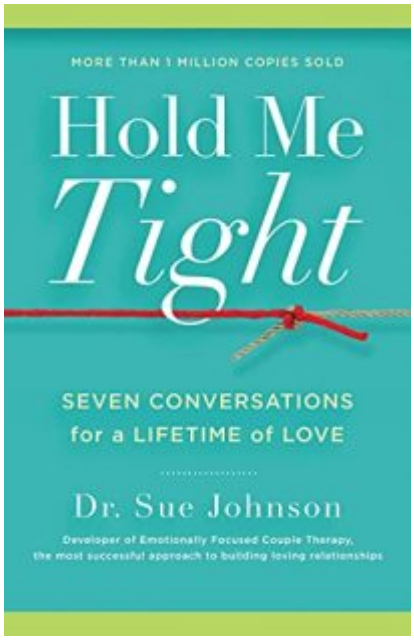
A psychologist argues that our culture's overwhelming abundance of options fuels anxiety, dissatisfaction, and decision paralysis, and suggests ways to make meaningful decisions.



On restoring emotional connection:

Hold Me Tight by Sue Johnson

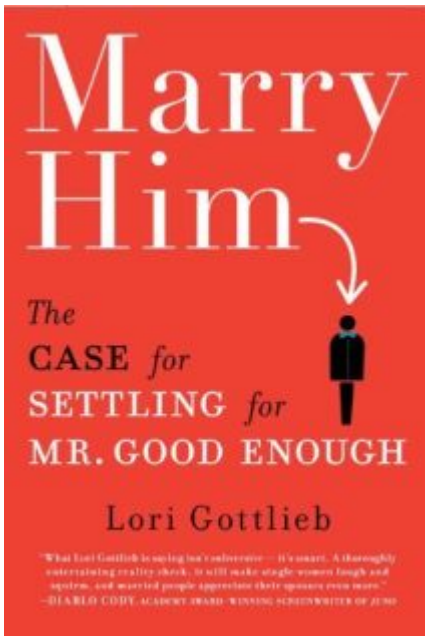
In *Hold Me Tight*, Dr. Sue Johnson teaches us that the key to strengthening or saving a relationship is rebuilding emotional connection through openness, attunement, and responsiveness.



On deal-breakers and personal standards:

Marry Him by Lori Gottlieb

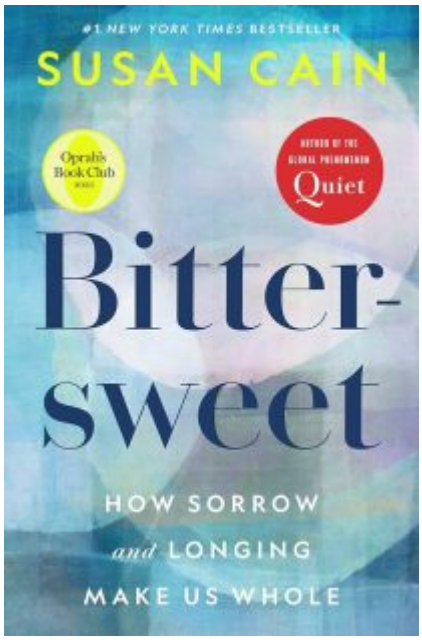
Lori Gottlieb, well known for her columns and other works, asks us to reconsider what makes for lasting romantic fulfillment, and whether we are too picky about that which doesn't matter.



On embracing wholeness:

Bittersweet by Susan Cain

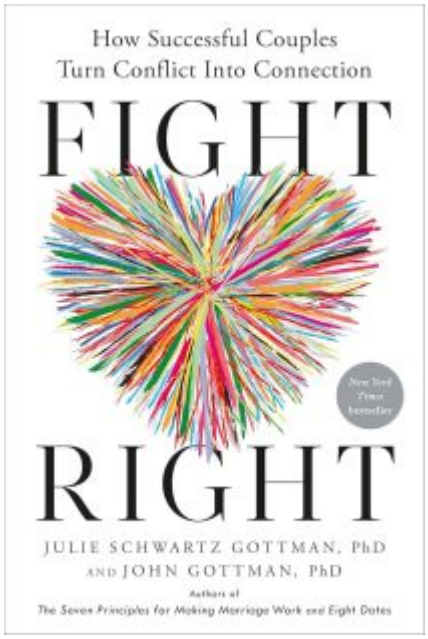
Susan Cain explores why we experience sorrow and longing, arguing that ultimately it leads us towards a sense of wholeness and harmony. (This one's also a Channah Cohen recommendation!)



On conflict as connection:

Fight Right by John Gottman and Julie Schwartz Gottman

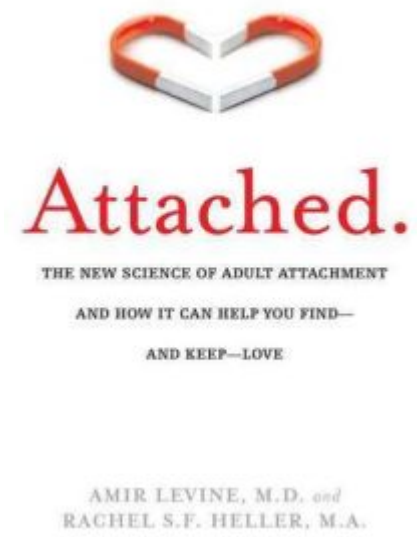
John and Julie Gottman show that while conflict is natural and even healthy, how couples handle it determines their relationship's future.



On building healthy bonds:

Attached by Amir Levine and Rachel Heller

Drawing on research into adult attachment styles, a psychiatrist and psychologist demonstrate how recognizing you and your partner's patterns can pave the way for healthier, more fulfilling relationships.



On abuse and red flags:

Why Does He Do That? by Lundy Bancroft

A groundbreaking, vital work about recognizing early warning signs of abuse, the nature of abusive thinking, abusive personality types, and more.

