ENVY
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The tragic deaths this past week of Kate Spade and Anthony Bourdain have once again raised our collective awareness of the mental illness that results in suicide, an illness that clouded in shame, silence and fear we too often ignore or speak of in only hushed tones and muted responses preferring to spend societal resources on treating broken bodies, rather than on the prevalence of broken minds, of mental illness in our increasingly stressful and isolating modern world.

Spade and Bourdain break through the silence because in the hierarchy of achievements that we seem to value more than others they had reached the pinnacle, they were celebrities. We mistakenly reason, they were immune to the daily stresses that us, mere mortals who have to deal with work-life balance, paying the bills,

being noticed in a world where on Facebook, Twitter and social media everyone is shouting for attention one click, one like at a time face every day.

They seemed to have it all, and yet they could not bear to live their lives any longer.

Apart from yearning again for more help for those who struggle with depression and mental illness, what can we do with the information that those whose lives we admire cannot bear to be alive?

How can we process the fact that all that they had and all that they'd done were not bulwark enough against the darkness? If the darkness of depression and despair can overcome the walls they built to insulate themselves from such pedestrian concerns, what hope is there for the rest of us?

It’s not much of a solace, but perhaps one thing these deaths could remind us of is the uselessness of envy.

The ancients that assembled and then canonized the oral stories that make up our sacred Torah, cautioned us in the most serious ways to keep far from envy. So important was this instruction that it is attributed to Moses’ 10 statements, *asseret ha’dibrot* on Mt Sinai, the 10 commandments.

לֹא תַחְמֹד בֵּית רֵעֶךָ לֹא־תַחְמֹד אֵשֶׁת רֵעֶךָ וְעַבְדּוֹ וַאֲמָתוֹ וְשׁוֹרוֹ וַחֲמֹרוֹ וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֶךָ׃

You shall not covet your neighbor’s house: you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female slave, or his ox or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor’s.

Belinda Luscombe, writing for Time magazine on the deaths of Spade and Bourdain added this:

“As with many of the behaviors once considered vices — greed, sloth, lust — envy reflects a miscalculation in the relative worth of things. When we look at lives like Spade’s and Bourdain’s, it can make our own feel wanting. We haven’t started our own companies, or turned our work experience into a book. They’re happier and more fulfilled, because we are not as hardworking or talented as they are. Their lives look better than ours, therefore they must be better people than we are.”

Our apparently biblical desire to turn the lives and possessions of others into a judgment on our own stems from the flawed calculation that the grass is always greener, that no one has burdens as heavy as our’s, problems as big as our’s, sorrows as profound as ours’.

Friends as I reflect on nearly 20 years of pastoral care of being invited into the lives of my congregants in the most personal and at times painful moments, witnessing the Joys and Oy I can tell you without any reservation or hesitation that many lives are not as they appear. Everybody has their *tzuruis,* we are all dealing with burdens that are a weight on our soul, soul crushing is the phrase that paints the clearest picture.

Happiness is not the lack of struggles, happiness is finding a way to live with struggle.

And if our envy is misplaced, maybe there's also a case to be made for having more compassion. If people's lives aren't as amazingly blissful as they appear, perhaps they're not as evil or stupid as they appear, either. Especially on the Internet.

I read in Luscombe's article about these two celebrities that in truth I knew little more than by name recognition that Bourdain once flew Marilyn Hagerty, a working mom, whose sweet review of her local Olive Garden had been mocked on the Internet, to New York City to dine at the restaurant of the moment, Per Se, and then published a book of her columns.

Kate Spade donated boxes of clothing and bags to a foundation to help young women get started out of university so their lack of business attire didn't obscure their talent.

So often, maybe always, our outward impressions of people's lives are wildly off-base.

And just as often our inward impressions of our own are too harsh, too lacking in empathy for ourselves, rachmanus, self love, patience, gentleness. All that we crave from others we must also give to ourselves.

Please be gentle with each other, be gentle with yourself, your soul, your essence.. We are fragile vessels, mere mortals.

Elohai – my God
Neshama sh'natatah bee t'horah hee
The soul that You have given me is pure.
Atah barata, Atah yatzarta, Atah n'fachta bee
You created it, You formed it, You breathed it into me;
V'Atah m'shamra be'kirbee
You keep my body and soul together.
As long as my soul is within me,
I give thanks to You Adonai,

my God and the God of my ancestors,

Master of all Creation, Lord of all souls.

Praised are You, Adonai,

Restorer of souls.

And when it is not within me. When is appears far from me, distant and insufferable I will have compassion for myself and for others. I will be gentle, and patient when those things elude me and even if they don't I will not be too prideful to ask for help from you, from my family from my friends. I am not alone, I am not unique in my struggles. I am only human.