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Mindfulness and Meditation

Final Paper

“The Anatomy of Hope” - Jerome Groopman

*Our Bodies vs. Our Minds*

In “The Anatomy of Hope,” Groopman tells his accounts of patient interactions over his career as a hematologist-oncologist, and how the idea of hope played into his career and personal life. At the start of his career, Groopman discusses the strict emphasis on the idea of physical medical science - the idea that if you know about how the body works, you can treat a condition most effectively. The idea of treating the “mind” in addition to the body was an unheard of concept. Doctors did sometimes have to connect with their patients to convince them to proceed with treatment, but it was a regular practice for the relationship between doctor and patient to be strictly professional, speaking only of prognosis and treatment, not of emotional wellbeing. However as time passes and Groopman delves further into his career, and as the world of science and medicine advances, he discovers the importance of mindset - specifically the concept of “hope” - in recovery.

I looked at this concept with the last set of readings of Hillenbrand, Costello, and Marchant. Hillenbrand’s article and interview, and Marchant’s piece, focused on how just a

change in mindset can help in your body's healing because your mind controls so much of what happens within your body. Marchant wrote about how what we perceive as fatigue is really just our brain trying to protect us when in reality we have much more power within us; "You don't have to believe what you are feeling and you don't have to believe what your brain is saying... However bad you feel, you can carry on and you can still do better'" (Marchant 67). We possess the potential to control both our bodies and our minds, we just have to realize this.

This is exactly what Groopman learned over his career not just through his patient interactions, but in his own life when he suffered from 19 years of chronic back pain. Groopman had visited many doctors for his problem, and despite the common use of treating both mind and body that he had experienced in oncology, none of his doctors recommended this to him. This is exactly what Marchant wrote about - "the problem... comes from a mindset that pervades medicine, in which illnesses are seen as either biological or psychological... The vast majority of von Lichtenberg 2 doctors have this dualistic understanding of mind and body," (Marchant 74). This idea, even when proven wrong, is still commonly believed because when we are sick and our doctor tells us information we often don't question it. No one proposed the idea to Groopman that maybe his pain was coming from his mind, and despite knowing treating the mind is necessary in recovery, he still did not think of this possibility on his own because his specialists weren't saying this to him.

After years of studying medical sciences, Groopman thought nothing would be able to ease his pain and suffering, but his visit with Dr. Rainville changed this. Rainville told him "You are worshipping the volcano god of pain... the more you sacrifice, the more the god demands, until your life contracts, and it has, into a very, very narrow space," (Groopman 155).

Essentially, the mind can be trained to remember pain and suffering, and this pain won't end until you tell yourself that the pain won't cause you harm. All you need to do to fix your problems, is change your mindset, and it worked. Groopman slowly underwent rehabilitation of his own accord just from believing that his pain was not permanent and would not cause him further damage. Through all his patient interactions Groopman saw that people present their hope and handle their suffering in many different ways. He had patients who carried a negative mindset to their death, and he had patients who carried a positive mindset to their death. However, the patients with hope and positivity had a less painful journey filled with much less suffering than those who only thought of the negatives - just the same as he experienced with his recovery.

Another who experienced this phenomenon is Lynne Cox, the American open-water swimmer, writer, and speaker. In one of her autobiographies, *Swimming In the Sink*, Lynne talks of her own personal journey through illness when she is diagnosed with a serious heart problem. After having been an elite athlete for essentially her entire life, Cox is forced to stop exerting herself in any way, barely being able to walk without having to stop to catch her breath. However, Cox writes deeply about how her journey to recovery was made possible by her friends and the community she had around her. Specifically, Lynne had one close friend Joe who helped her the most in recovering. Joe teaches Lynne the importance of a positive mindset during recovery - a somewhat foreign concept to her. She writes that "Joe knew I was in a dark place and knew how to help me find my way out. He said that negative thoughts were like parasites. They were often transmitted from one person to another by negative comments" (Cox 144). Joe tells Lynne to start doing small things, like smiling when she wakes up in the