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### Healing Together

Health. What is the first thing you thought of when you read this word? Was it a doctor's office? Exercise? Vegetables? A band aid? When thinking about health these ideas swirl in my mind. Rarely, however, does mental wellbeing cross my mind.

Most people have heard that over the past few years our world has been confronted with a mental health crisis. Loneliness, depression, eating disorders have all risen to unprecedented levels. Almost every human has been faced with these challenges. Yet, we know barely anything about how to confront them. While we've hyper-focused on the temples that are our bodies, we've left behind the congregation that is our mind. And, how is a temple to thrive when there is no one to embrace or lead it?

Part of the issue with addressing mental health is the discomfort it causes. Everyone has some level of challenge, whether it be insecurity, or extreme depression, just as no one's physical health is completely perfect. However, we have been taught that to have these challenges is wrong, we could be called crazy in fact. Instead of addressing our issues, then, we hide them, believing they make us abnormal.

I have been lucky enough to be raised in a family who has valued and taught me vulnerability. While vulnerability has not come easily to me, I have found that embracing it, and being able to discuss my own insecurities and challenges is the greatest way to help me through them. I often learn that the challenges I believe I am going through alone are shared by many of

my peers and family members. Talking about these feelings allows me to work through them alongside the people I love, and brings the most peaceful healing. While I understand that greater mental health issues can likely not be solved by a simple chat, I do believe opening up about our mental health status is a great start.

The Covid-19 pandemic showed a prime example of how our society swept mental health under the rug. Almost every headline in the past two years has screamed about hospitalizations, Covid-19 symptoms, masks, case-rates, and sheltering in place. The media floods our brains with information on how to keep ourselves from getting infected and data on how deadly Covid-19 can be. However, the anxiety Covid-19 caused, the effects of social isolation, the loss of connection, were rarely discussed. While the Covid-19 virus infected many, the ramifications of isolation affected all.

Although it was painful to watch as confinement took our community into dark places, I do believe people began to learn the value of mental wellbeing. While there is still copious stigma around discussing mental health, people have learned how our community can help take care of our internal strength. I have observed how much more grateful my family is for a simple walk to clear our heads and have a good laugh. I have been fortunate enough to be a part of a class who continuously strives to be able to bond with each other, perpetually planning activities to make up for lost time. These new ways bring me great hope for the future. We may live in a broken world, but as we recognize we are broken together we can find joy in each other.