

Catching upstream

Once upon a time there was a small village on the edge of a river. The people there were good and life in the village was good. One day a villager noticed a baby floating down the river. The villager quickly swam out to save the baby from drowning. The next day this same villager noticed two babies in the river. He called for help, and both babies were rescued from the swift waters. And the following day four babies were seen caught in the turbulent current. And then eight, then more, and still more!

The villagers organized themselves quickly, setting up watchtowers and training teams of swimmers who could resist the swift waters and rescue babies. Rescue squads were soon working 24 hours a day. And each day the number of helpless babies floating down the river increased. The villagers organized themselves efficiently. The rescue squads were now snatching many children each day. While not all the babies, now very numerous, could be saved, the villagers felt they were doing well to save as many as they could each day. Indeed, the village priest blessed them in their good work. And life in the village continued on that basis.

One day, however, someone raised the question, "But where are all these babies coming from? Let's organize a team to head upstream to find out who's throwing all of these babies into the river in the first place!"

The idea of looking upstream is important in relation to our health. For example in relation to tooth decay, we can either let it develop and we are then left with no option but to remove the tooth. Or we can go to the dentist on a regular basis for check-ups and cleaning before problems arise.

And so with mental health, how do we look after our mental health before it turns to mental illness? One approach that is used to help with mental health related issues is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. The basic idea here is that there is a chain reaction. An event happens called an activating trigger. We come to a belief or conclusion about it and as a result we act and feel in a certain way. What cognitive behavioural therapy challenges us to do, is that instead of just trying to deal with the behaviour, it invites you to examine the ideas causing your feelings and ideas.

The Bhagavad Gita describes the chain reaction in more detailed way, all starting with your thinking:

When a man thinks of objects, attachment for them arises.

From attachment arises desire;

from desire arises wrath.

From wrath arises delusion;

from delusion, failure of memory;

from failure of memory, loss of conscience;

from loss of conscience he is utterly ruined.

So the challenge for this week is look up stream, be aware of the underlying thoughts you have, and see if this can help you move from Darkness to Light.