* 1. It is only over the last half-century in western culture that “mental health”--a euphemism for mental ill-health and the social dysfunction that results from it--has emerged from dark regard in the public view to a status somewhat comparable with physical ill-health. Over that time, it has also become acceptable for normal people to consider raising their mental health a notch or two through one means or another including professional therapy. This has often meant finding a remedy for partial dysfunction of, for example, depression or drug-dependency or obesity or marriage problems. There are still others who wish to address even lesser discomforts of stress or general anxiety and even, more recently to seek greater happiness.
  2. There is then a spectrum of mental health: from the severely debilitated to those seeking, at the upper end, a still better experience even though the one they have might be regarded as better than most. As we traverse this spectrum of course the methods and approaches change. At the bottom, the problems are addressed by professionals who typically administer drugs in additional to professionally guided therapy. These are expensive methods but paid for by society. But once a person becomes functional, the onus passes to the individual (or, for the fortunate, to a corporate program) and only those with the means can afford professional services.
  3. However, in recent years in this society, a variety of “non-professional” aids have become available. In 1859, Samuel Smiles published a book entitled “Self-Help”, with the encouraging opening line that “God helps those who help themselves”. Today the self-help industry is, according to some estimates, worth $20 billion.
  4. The existence of this industry illustrates two features of society. It reflects the natural contour of all societies , in that “advice”, new ideas that we can use to change our existing choice of thought and behaviour, is readily available. It comes from parents, grandparents, teachers, managers, and mentors of other kinds. It arrives spontaneously in our often subconscious adoption of the habits of various exemplars—including bad ones. So the self-help