

## Role of Free Will in Making Choices and Wellness

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**ABSTRACT:** Wellness is an active process of becoming aware of and making choices toward a more successful existence. It has also been described as the constant, conscious pursuit of living life to its fullest potential. Wellness is a combination of healthiness and happiness. The self-actualization process for the personal growth helps create true happiness from within. Happiness is a choice one has to make. In a world of seemingly endless options, the choices which we make for ourselves make us happier. If there is a big clash between our own choices and the options which we are pressurized to choose, incongruity between the real and ideal self develops. This leads to a disintegrated and maladjusted personality. Freedom of making choice as per own will with complete acceptance and support from the significant others ushers one to the fullest realization of the potential. It enhances the acceptance of self. It leads to the virtues of optimism, trust, self-respect and autonomy which make us more confident, self-reliant, positive, secure and happier. Further it develops a healthy and balanced personality striving to actualize, maintain and enhance the experiencing organism. Such an organism on a path of personal growth is a perfect combination of happiness, healthiness and wellness. In this paper, such a model of wellness based on free will of making choices has been proposed which instills personal growth with a healthy and happy life.

**Key Words:** Wellness, free will, freedom of choice, personal growth, happiness, self-congruence.

### INTRODUCTION

Wellness has been defined in a number of ways. Generally, it is used to describe a healthy balance of the mind, body and spirit that results in an overall feeling of well-being. Dunn (1961) defined wellness as “an integrated method of functioning which is oriented toward maximizing the potential of which the individual is capable. It requires that the individual maintain a continuum of balance and purposeful direction within the environment where he is functioning”. He also stated that “wellness is a direction in progress toward an ever-higher potential of functioning”. The term has been defined by the Singapore-based National Wellness Association as *an active process of becoming aware of and making choices toward a more successful existence* (James,2005). This is consistent with a shift in focus away from illness in studying human health, typical of the contexts where wellness is used. In other words, wellness is a view of health that emphasizes the state of the entire being and its ongoing development. To comprehend, wellness can also be described as “the constant, conscious pursuit of living life to its fullest potential”.

Wellness is a combination of healthiness and happiness. Besides possessing a good health (physical and mental), happiness is a very significant part of wellness. It is a state of being; only the self can create. The self-actualization process for the personal growth helps create true happiness from within. Finding true happiness is a very personal journey. Happiness is a choice one has to make. In a world of seemingly endless options, what choices make us happier? Is it the choices which we make for ourselves or the choices which others make for us? Probably the choices that we make. Optimism, trust, self-respect and autonomy make us happier. It enhances the acceptance of self.

At most of the times in life, the ingredients of a happy life are not just a matter of personal choice. They are also determined by the social conditions in which we live, and, in turn, are influenced by our family, parents and other significant persons in our life. According to Rogers (1951), as a result of interaction with the environment, and particularly interaction with others, the structure of self is formed. The self-structure of the organism has one basic tendency and striving to actualize, maintain and enhance the experiencing organism. Most of the ways of behaving that are adopted by the organism are those that are consistent with the concept of self. Personality has extremely strong desire for self-esteem. But at times the desire for social esteem overtakes the values that the self-organism desires. When it is too important for the personality to be considered of worth by others, it may debilitate the inner functions and dynamics of the organismic self.

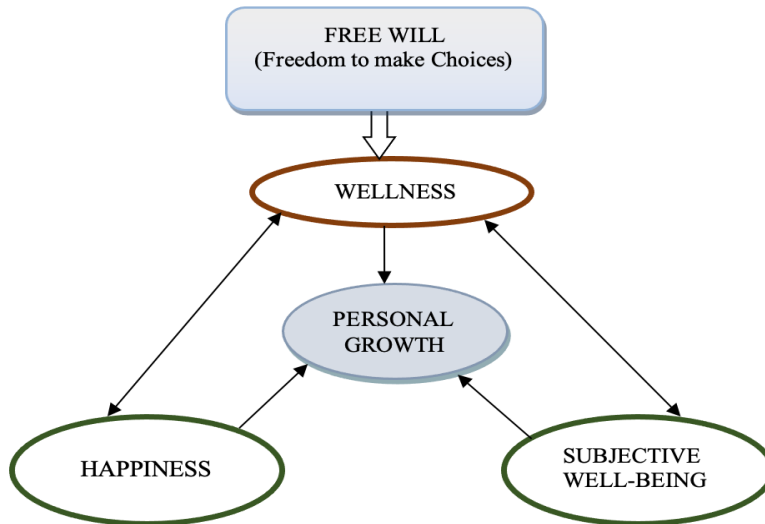
Real self is that aspect of the being which is founded in the propensity of actualization. It adheres to organismic valuing, needs and receives positive regard and self-regard. On the other hand, most of the times our society is out of sync with the actualizing tendency. In such situations, we are forced to live with conditions of worth that are inconsistent with organismic values, and receive only conditional positive regard and self-regard. This way we develop an ideal self. This gap between the real self and the ideal self, the “I am” and the “I should” is known as incongruity of the self (Rogers, 1959). To avoid the anxiety because of conflict in social and self-esteem, ideal self and real self, person uses defense mechanisms. Prolonged use of such mechanisms produces sizable gap between the real self and the ideal self. The larger this gap, the greater is the individual’s maladjustment. Rogers suggested that such distortions in the self-concept are common because most people grow in an atmosphere of conditional positive regard.

#### **Freedom of Making Choices, Wellness and Personal Growth**

When the ideal self overpowers the individual’s real self, he loses his self-regard. Though individual receives regard from others, but the course of personal growth is hampered. When a conflicting situation arises in which there’s a clash between the needs and wants of the self and the demands enforced by others, the self weakens, and the health is subjected to deterioration. One cannot expect any contentment and happiness in such conditions. The concept of personal growth can only operate when the individual has the discretion to exercises his free will and does what his real self desires. For the wellness of beings, with a happy and healthy self, the individual should be allowed to exercise the preferences, choices and decisions of his own real self with due regard. When these choices are accepted and supported by the significant others unconditionally, this gratitude and kindness lift our spirits. Such choices when clearly perceived and adequately accomplished without any presses from the outer world, give boost to the self. In such conditions, there is more congruence of the self. Lesser the gap between the real self and the ideal self, closer one is to the state of wellness. Various factors contribute to lessen this gap and promote wellness, and one such significant factor is exercising the free will and having the freedom of making choices. When the choices are made by the individual, happiness and satisfaction prevails. Having clear goals to work towards a sense of becoming fully functional, developing a coherent and positive self, and a belief that we are accepted without any condition foster wellness.

#### **Free Will Model of Wellness and Personal Growth**

With the above description, it is proposed that having the free will to make a choice is one significant factor of wellness. Wellness is a combination of happiness and healthiness. Wellness, happiness, and healthiness lead to personal growth. So, free will i.e., freedom to make choice being a factor of wellness leads to personal growth.



**Fig. 1 –Free Will Model of Wellness**

### **How Freedom of Making Choices improve Wellness and Personal Growth**

With this proposal of free will model of wellness, it is put forward that using free will in being free to take own decisions and choices is an important indicator of wellness, hence resulting in personal growth. Being a significant contributor to wellness, freedom of making choice enhances wellness enroute personal growth in beings in following ways –

- With freedom to take decisions, one is able to evaluate, reflect, visualize and then decide. Decision making ability is thus gradually enhanced. Free will gradually makes the person mature and wiser in making choices and imagination and other higher cognitive processes also sharpen.
- Wrong choices may temporarily frustrate the individual, but for individuals who are on a conscious trip to growth, it may be a lesson learnt the hard way. This kind of learning builds autonomy, accountability and resilience in the individual.
- Freedom of choice leads one to the realization of potential. Unless one makes a choice, one cannot have firsthand experience of any situation. Thus, choosing for oneself provides a testing ground to check and try out one's skills. Lot of courage and initiative is required to make one's choices. Acceptance of challenges is thus cultivated.
- Keen insight, knowledge and versatile interests are essential for making good choices in life. Thus, for exerting free will in making choices, one would make the effort to understand the context in a wide perspective. Knowledge empowers and promotes wellness. Freedom of making choices in various spheres leads to experimentation with different ideas and this initiates creativity in the individual. It also enhances the decision-making ability.
- When a child or an individual is free to make choices, he would follow his heart, his hunches, and his insights and would not decide on an act to please or satisfy anyone else, but for only his fulfillment. Such actions in the long run contribute to growth and wellness.

### **CONCLUSION**

The process of development of self and personality starts at a very young age. So, it's very crucial to develop the ability to decide and choose in children. This does not mean at all to support complete autonomy without any direction; this can make the children defiant. This can also result into failures and frustrations, hence leading them nowhere. Children at this tender age are not so knowledgeable and experienced, so there's possibility of making wrong decisions. Hence, they should

be guided but not forced to choose. The options should be made clear to them with their importance and drawbacks but should not be made compulsory for them. One of the great disillusionments of social independence is discovering how increased free will in making of choice turns out to be not so free after all. It's a hard reality to accept, while there is more freedom of choice; more choice is not entirely free (Pickhardt, 2013). So, it is important that children should be made aware of the fact that there is no free choice because every personal decision comes with baggage in the form of consequences that follow. With the freedom and right to decision-making, one need to learn to own the responsibility of the consequences also.

The freedom to opt should be one's own. It'll give them a sense of self-satisfaction, confidence and independence. If they'll choose it for themselves, they will learn to make better judgments and it will develop a better decision-making ability in them. When the goal is chosen by them only, they'll strive hard to chase and attain it. It'll definitely improve their ability to aspire and attain goals. And when they'll be successful in their ventures, they'll be motivated to achieve higher goals. Freedom to exercise free will to choose will allow them to see dreams and then they'll put their best to realize those dreams, hence enabling them to explore and utilize their potentials to the most and heading them on to a path of personal growth. Such a sense of self contentment will develop more positivity, happier and healthier personality, and in turn enhance the overall wellness of the beings.

### **Further Implications**

This is a theoretical model being proposed here. In near future, an empirical study on young students would be done to validate the proposal. The findings of that study will enlighten more evidently on the concept and model.

***“Your life is the sum result of all the choices you make, both consciously and unconsciously. If you can control the process of choosing, you can take control of all aspects of your life. You can find the freedom that comes from being in charge of yourself.”***

***~ Robert F. Bennett***

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