

## **Applied Positive Psychology**

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**Week 5**

### **Lecture 13: Character strengths: Concepts, Theories, and Interventions**

I welcome you all to module five of this course, which is titled Applied Positive Psychology. Module five is about the concept of psychological strengths and assets. This is the first lecture of this module, and overall, this is lecture number 13. Today's lecture is titled "Character Strengths, Concepts, Theories, and Interventions." We'll discuss a specific concept related to strengths: character strengths. Today's lecture will discuss the different ideas and interventions associated with that concept. Before discussing today's lecture, let me briefly recap the last lecture. In the previous lecture, part of the earlier module, module number 4 revolved around the psychology of flow and mindfulness. The last lecture was more specifically related to understanding the connection between flow and mindfulness and some specific interventions related to both.

So, in that context, we have discussed the various interventions and the factors that we can consider while increasing or facilitating the process of law. We discussed various factors that should be taken care of in any situation to facilitate the flow experience. We also discussed the relationship between flow and mindfulness. In that context, we understand that mindfulness is often used to train the mind so that a mindful state could be an essential facilitator for flow. We discussed differences and connections between these two concepts. Finally, we discussed the various available mindfulness-based therapeutic interventions, where mindfulness is an essential strategy or concept integrated within the therapeutic approaches. These are some things we discussed in the last lecture.

So, in today's lecture, we'll focus on psychological strengths and their benefits. We'll also talk about a particular classification system of strengths called the VIA classification of character strengths and virtues. We'll also examine how character strengths connect happiness and well-being. And at the end, we'll discuss cultivating character strengths. So, this will be the primary focus of today's lecture. So, let's start today's lecture.

Let's begin with the concept of what is a psychological strength? When we talk about psychological strengths, what do we mean by them? There are specific ways to look at them. One of the ways we can understand strength is that psychological strengths are built-in capacities for particular thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. When we talk about psychological strengths, we are talking about certain inbuilt capacities that human beings have, which could manifest themselves in terms of thoughts, feelings, or actions. When discussing psychological strength, some examples are when people show traits like courage, optimism, perseverance, gratitude, etc. These are all different expressions of strength that people have in a psychological sense.

So, these are like those strengths that are built into all of us. It can be facilitated; it can be enhanced, and so on. The study of strengths is a foundational agenda for positive psychology because it reflects the positive side of human functioning. When we talk about positive psychology, one of the central ideas or concepts around which positive psychology revolves is psychological strength, because it is one of the most central concepts that can help us understand the positive dimensions of human behavior. That is why it is an essential component of positive psychology.

Now, why should we understand psychological strength? What are the benefits of studying psychological strengths? So, when we talk about the benefits of understanding or using psychological strengths in our lives, there are numerous advantages that we can gain from using or understanding psychological strengths. Some of these are listed here, which were listed by Boniwell in one of her books, which summarizes the values and functions of strengths. What are the important values and functions of strength? One is that strength encourages insights and perspectives in life. So, whenever we understand strength, whatever strength we have, or when we use specific strengths that we all have in our lives, it gives us more insight about ourselves, so that we understand better that we also have these strengths. These are certain qualities that also define human beings. That gives us better insights, an understanding of ourselves, etc. So, it also gives you a perspective on life in terms of understanding life and how to behave, where to proceed, and so on. Strength directs many human behaviors. Second, psychological strengths make one less sensitive to stress. The more strengths you have, the more varieties of strengths you possess, particularly some strengths such as the sense of resilience, which will help us deal with problems, challenges, or stressful situations in life, because whenever you are in a stressful or traumatic situation, you become much more vulnerable. At that time, having inner strength will help you deal with all these life problems. Strengths also generate a sense of optimism and

resilience. Whenever you have certain strengths and resources within you, you are more optimistic that you will be able to handle the situation, and you will be more resilient in dealing with situations, and so on.

Strength also provides a sense of direction. When you have certain strengths and resources within you, you know that you can go in this direction and achieve your goals, and so on. It can also give you a sense of direction in many situations. Strengths also help develop confidence and self-esteem. Obviously, when you have certain psychological strengths, they are also connected to your confidence and self-esteem. You may be more confident in doing things, and it may enhance your self-esteem. Strengths also generate a sense of vitality and energy because strengths, by definition, mean they give you energy. It gives you, in vitality, a sense of a positive outlook on life. Strength also stimulates a sense of happiness and fulfillment. When you use more and more strength, you gain a lot of joy because you are good at doing something, so it is automatically connected to happiness and fulfillment. Strength also helps achieve one's goals. The achievement of objectives can be facilitated by the strength that we all have. It also enables one to be more engaged in work and perform better. So when you do some tasks that align with your strengths, you are more likely to get engaged because you are good at it, you have strengths, so you are more likely to focus your attention, put in more energy, and increase your engagement. There are diverse benefits in understanding our strengths, and if you use them more and more, all these benefits can come into one's life. So, developing and following one's strengths can build resilience and prevent psychological illnesses. So, these are like some other extensions of those benefits.

Following one's strengths can build resilience and prevent psychological illnesses. For example, developing optimism may help buffer against depression. Let's say some psychological disorders are related to specific problems in thoughts; for example, depressed people mostly exhibit one of the main characteristics of depression, which is that a lot of pessimistic thoughts are present within them because their future looks dark, leading to hopelessness and similar issues. So, in such a situation, let's say, if you can help these people develop certain strengths of thought, like optimistic thoughts, it will help them to at least prevent some of the depressive episodes, and so on. This is because when you are optimistic, you cannot be depressed. So sudden strength can, by definition, work or prevent certain psychological disorders, emotional problems, and so on. The strength approach underlies most successful psychological therapies, such as instilling hope, optimism, and courage in clients. If

you look at most psychological therapies and counseling principles, they are actually connected with building strengths among the clients.

Because people go to therapy, many psychological disorders occur when they become vulnerable and don't have the energy and strength to face the situations in their lives. So, in such situations, many people in this vulnerable position are more likely to develop various psychological disorders. So many of these therapies are associated with, directly or indirectly, instilling certain strengths within themselves through strengths of thought, emotion, action, and so on. They may indirectly or directly instill hope, optimism, and courage within those clients so that they can face the problems of their lives and become more resilient.

Now, in psychology, how do we understand strength? So, there are different approaches to understanding strength. There are different theoretical approaches. Some of these theoretical approaches will be discussed in this particular module. Typically, these are the three we will be discussing in this module. One is the VIA classification of strengths and virtues. This will be the focus of today's lecture. The other lecture will focus on Gallup Strengths Finders and CAPP's realise2 4M model. These are all models that talk about how to understand strengths, how to develop them, their importance, and so on, from a different theoretical perspective.

So, today's lecture will focus on the first one, which is called the VIA classification of strengths and virtues. More specifically, we will discuss character strength, which is the strength of character, not just general strengths. The other two we will be discussing in the following lecture. So let us talk about the VIA classification of strengths and virtues. This classification was developed by two people, Peterson and Seligman, in 2004. They created a classification system of strengths and virtues, taking cues from the DSM, called the Value in Action Classification. So, VIA means Value in Action Classification. So, they took this idea from the DSM, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. The DSM has elaborately classified psychological disorders into different categories, subcategories, and so on. So, they took an idea from there: If you can classify weaknesses and disorders, why can't we also classify the strengths that human beings can have? So, out of this whole exercise, this entire VIA classification system came into existence, which basically means Value in Action classification. So, the DSM classifies mental disorders, while VIA classifies character strengths and virtues. In VIA, they classified different character strengths that human beings can display. These character strengths are the aspects of personality that are morally valued. So, when we

talk about character strengths, they are not just psychological strengths. We are talking about those strengths that have a moral value. So, that is why they are called strengths of character.

There is some connotation of morally accepted values attached to it. So, we look for good character as a desirable quality in all people, including leaders, teachers, and students across all sections of society. We all expect that people should have good character or strengths of good character, which are desirable qualities, morally good qualities. This is generally what we all expect from other people. So, this classification deals with those kinds of character strengths, which are morally desirable and general expectations from all people we have. Academic skills and abilities, such as critical thinking, help people achieve goals. But without good character strengths, individuals may lack the desire to do the right thing in their lives. This is why understanding character strengths is so important. Now we have many other strengths, such as strengths of thought; you may have many skills, critical thinking abilities, and so on. Now, these things help you achieve goals, but if you don't have character strengths, you may not have the intention to do the right things in life. One may achieve many higher goals in life because of strengths in one's thought processes and critical thinking abilities. But if they lack character strengths, they will fall from there because they may do wrong things in their life. In a sense, character strengths are significant for overall development, enhancing the quality of life, emotional aspects of life, happiness, satisfaction, and so on. Those well-being indicators are more closely linked to character strengths.

So even if you are perfect or maybe a genius in terms of using mental abilities and so on, that doesn't guarantee success in life or sustainable happiness if you lack character strengths, because you will not have the intention to do the right things. So, in that context, character strengths are significant in our lives. So, this is what this classification does in terms of understanding the varieties of character strengths that are important. So, according to Park and Peterson, exercising character strengths prevents undesirable life outcomes because it is very important for positive life outcomes in terms of emotions, well-being, and happiness.

Specific character strengths include kindness, social intelligence, self-control, etc. Buffer against the negative effects of stress and trauma. So, this also has many connotations for adjusting to life and dealing with life's problems. Certain character strengths, such as hope, kindness, social intelligence, self-control, etc., are significant. It also helps people thrive and is associated with desired outcomes such as school success, leadership, tolerance, valuing diversity, the ability to delay gratification, kindness, altruism, helping behavior, etc.

So, it also has a diverse outcome. Not only related to well-being and so on, but even in performance settings, certain character strengths also lead to higher school performance. So, Peterson and Seligman, who developed this whole classification system, used certain criteria for which strengths should be included in the list and which should be excluded. So, they use certain criteria because there are so many such character strengths that we cannot include everything. So, they used a few criteria that, to include them in the classification system or in the list, they should have certain characteristics.

So, they use the following characteristics to include any character strengths in the list or the classification system. One is that character strengths should be ubiquitous, meaning they should be widely recognized across cultures. So only those character strengths that are widely recognized across different cultures were included in the classification system. This should not be only culture-specific. Second, they include only those character strengths related to fulfillment, meaning they should contribute to individual fulfillment, satisfaction, and happiness broadly constructed.

So, when all these character strengths contribute to fulfilling one's life, life satisfaction, happiness, emotional well-being, and so on, the third criterion they use is that it should be morally valued. The classification system should include only those character strengths that are morally valued in their own right and not for tangible outcomes. Whether they give you a particular result is secondary, but the first important thing is that they are morally valued. People desire these qualities in others to call them good human beings.

Third, it should not diminish others. When you use this character strength, you should do so in a way that does not diminish other people. So, your expression of character strength will not make other people less or, in any sense, diminish them. So, it should elevate others who witness it, producing admiration rather than jealousy. So, character strength, when you show it, will not diminish others. On the other hand, they will elevate other people by saying that they will feel more encouraged and inspired, and so on. So that should be another characteristic. The last characteristic they said is that to be called a character strength, it should have a non-felicitous as its opposite. That means it has obvious antonyms that are negative. If you have a particular character strength, it will have some opposite spectrum. So, for example, let us say, "hope", so there will be hopelessness as the opposite thing. So, most of this character strength will also have an opposite construct. They use this criterion to list the possible character strengths that are important in human life, and they made an elaborate classification system. So, they listed a

few more traits; they should be traits like individual differences and stable characteristics. It should not be that you show a characteristic one day and the next day you do not; it cannot be called a character strength. It has to be a stable characteristic of the person. In most situations, the person should show that in a long-term and relatively permanent sense. Then only does it become a part of that character. If you show it only sometimes and don't show it most of the time, then it is not a part of character strengths. Then, they also used some measurable characteristics because, to do research, we need quantifiable qualities. Researchers have successfully measured this as an individual difference.

It should be distinct. It's not redundant, conceptually and empirically, with other characteristics. Each characteristic should be different from the others; they should not overlap, should have paragons, which means it's strikingly embodied in some individuals. Some individuals will strikingly have character strengths that can be visible and define that person based on those strengths. It has prodigies that are similar to that. Some children or even youths pre-consciously show it. Some people will show this in such a strong way that it is visible that this person has these character strengths. It can be selectively absent; some people will have it, while others may be completely missing. Some individuals possess this character strength, or it has enabling institutions, so it is the deliberate target of societal practices and rituals that try to cultivate it. So, this character's strengths at a larger societal and community level, as well as at an institutional level, will have an enabling capacity in terms of people aspiring to be part of institutions, societies, and so on.

So, all these characteristics were listed, and accordingly, they listed certain characteristics and made a classification. Let us look into this entire classification system. This is called the VIA classification, which means value in action classification system. So, using all these criteria we discussed earlier, Peterson and Seligman identified 24 character strengths, which are organized into six primary virtues. So, six virtues were then divided into 24 character strengths. That means virtue is a broader construct. Again, each of these virtues is divided into specific character strengths. So, this is how they made this classification. There are six virtues. All six of these are then divided into subcategories that are called character strengths. In total, when combined, it becomes 24 character strengths. These virtues are the more core universal characteristics valued by moral philosophers and religious thinkers, such as wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, transcendence, and so on. Virtues are more core universal values that are morally desirable, broader constructs, and these character strengths are more specific expressions of them. These character strengths are the specific psychological processes or

mechanisms that define virtues such as kindness and love, or aspects of humanity. So, humanity is a virtue; under this, there may be character strengths of love and kindness. This virtue is a broader term; character strengths are a more specific expression of that virtue, so this is how they define these terms. Let us look into their classification very quickly because we cannot go into the details of all these matters. It will take a lot of time. We will list what they have listed within these virtues and the character strengths.

So, virtues and corresponding strengths are listed here. The first virtue they included in the classification system is wisdom and knowledge. This is a broad virtue, which is like a desirable thing that, in a moral sense, is a desirable virtue. So, this includes positive traits related to the acquisition and use of information in the service of a good life, so when you use the knowledge or information from the world, you use this information for the good of life. So that's called wisdom and knowledge. In psychological language, these are cognitive strengths, such as strengths of thought processes. When you know, it means you have strength in your thought processes. There are five character strengths in the wisdom and knowledge category. So this is the virtue, and there are five character strengths listed in this category. These are all related to wisdom and virtue. So, under wisdom and virtue or knowledge, the character strengths included are creativity- thinking of novel and productive ways of doing things; curiosity- taking an interest in all the ongoing experiences; open-mindedness- thinking things through, and examining them from all sides, not just from one perspective. Love for learning- mastering new skills, and exploring topics and bodies of knowledge, and Perspective- involves being able to provide wise counsel to others. You understand the perspective of other people, and then you can tell them what the right things to do are and so on. So, these are specific expressions of wisdom and knowledge, which are broader virtues, and when they can be expressed as character strengths in these particular categories.

This is one virtue, while in total we have a total of six virtues. Second is called "courage." Courage is a broader virtue, which means it involves the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of external or internal opposition. Courage is your ability and will to accomplish goals in the face of difficulties. So, whenever there are struggles, obstacles, and challenges in life, how can you deal with them, face them, and achieve your goals despite all these problems. So that's the reflection of courage. Courage can be expressed regarding specific character strengths, which may require honesty.

So, these are broad concepts that can be connected to courage. Speaking the truth and genuinely presenting oneself also require a lot of courage. Courage can also be expressed in honesty because honesty is brutal in all situations. You need a lot of courage to be honest because sometimes honesty may invite many problems into one's life. So, honesty can be an essential expression of courage.

Bravery is a direct expression of courage, not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain. So, whenever problems and difficulties arise, you don't shrink; you still face and continue with the struggles. Persistence is finishing what one starts, your ability to pursue things that you think are valuable, whatever problems may arise; once you start, you try to finish them as much as possible. The jest is approaching life with excitement and energy. So, courage is also expressed in terms of jest when you approach life. Your approach to life is very positive, with a lot of energy and excitement. So, these are the four expressions of courage that can be called character strengths. The third one is called humanity, the virtue of humanity, and under this, there are three character strengths. Humanity includes things related to interpersonal strengths. How do you relate to people? What is your relationship with others? So, that is what humanity, as a virtue, expresses. How do you express your relationships with other people? So it may include things such as kindness- doing favors and good deeds for others. So you have good intentions for other people. So that is expressed in terms of helping, supporting, etc. Love-values close relations with other people. So, when you value the relationship, express it positively; that can be called love. Then comes social intelligence, which means being aware of the motives and feelings of oneself and others. The more you understand yourself and others, their motives and feelings, and other people's perspectives, the more it is called social intelligence. You are not just intelligent in the thinking process, but you also understand other people, understand yourself, and behave; accordingly, that is called social intelligence. You are more intelligent in social situations. So those are all expressions of humanity as a virtue, and they can be called specific character strengths or expressions of humanity. The fourth one is called justice, which includes civic strengths, strengths related to civic sense, etc. So, justice is a virtue that can express itself in specific character strengths like fairness, treating all people the same according to the notions of fairness and justice. So, when you are fair in your dealings with people, you don't discriminate against people based on their categories, and you believe in giving justice to people, and so on. So that's an expression of fairness. Leadership is also strongly related to justice; a true leader will always believe in justice, organizing group activities, and ensuring they happen. This is also an ability of a leader because they have to

deal with other people, and justice will always be an essential part of leadership qualities. Teamwork, working well as a group or team member, able to go along with others and work as a group and team. So that is called teamwork. That is also a part of justice. So, justice will facilitate teamwork, leadership, and so on. These are specific expressions of the virtue of justice, which are character strengths associated with that. The fifth is temperance, which includes strengths that buffer us against excess in life. Temperance means you can control yourself, don't go to excess in anything. So that's called temperance. It is expressed in terms of various specific character strengths. One expression could be forgiveness. So, forgive those who have done wrong. You don't go to the extreme of jealousy, taking revenge, etc. You also tend to forgive people whenever possible. So that is also an expression of temperance. You don't go to extremes with anything. Modesty is letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves. You don't just start advertising all the time that you have achieved this or that. A lack of temperance is expressed when people show too much and promote too much about their achievements. So, modesty means the opposite of that. You don't speak too much, but your actions will automatically speak for themselves. So that's called modesty. Prudence is about being careful with one's choices and not saying or doing things that might later be regretted. So, prudence means that a person is very careful in their choices in life, in terms of what they say and so on. Be more cautious, care for yourself, behave very carefully, etc. You don't say anything that you later regret without really thinking about it, and so on. It is about whatever choice you make in life; you do it very carefully and with reflection, and so on. Self-regulation is also an important core aspect of temperance, regulating what one feels and does. You can also regulate your emotions and thought processes and mould them according to the situation. For example, if you are angry; it doesn't mean you show your anger in every situation. So you can control it and express it according to the situation's needs, and so on. These are all expressions of temperance, and they are all specific character strengths associated with it. The last one is called "transcendence." This is more related to the concept of connecting to the larger universe. So, it is more related to spirituality. So, transcendence is a virtue when you go into the domains of life where you connect with the larger universe. You are not just thinking about your own life, but going beyond, connecting to the larger universe.

So that can be expressed in terms of appreciating beauty and excellence. Like more highly refined things. Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, skills, and performance in all domains of life. So, this can be an expression of transcendence in that you appreciate beauty, excellence, subtle things, the aesthetics of life, and so on. Gratitude could also express

transcendence when being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen. When you connect with the larger universe, people also become grateful.

They see how things are happening, the role of higher powers, etc. So, that is where gratitude may emerge. Hope, expect the best, and work to achieve it. It is an expression of transcendence. Transcendence may also be linked to humor in the sense of liking to laugh and joke, bringing others a smile, which can also be an expression of it. Religiosity and spirituality could also be connected to transcendence. Mostly, it is connected to spiritual aspects. Having coherent beliefs about a higher purpose and meaning in life. So, religiousness or spirituality is connected to a higher power, meaning in life, and the purpose of existence; those kinds of things are associated with that concept, and transcendence is directly connected to those things. So, these are the six virtues they discussed and their specific expressions regarding character strengths. So, in total, there are 24 character strengths and six virtues.

Now, we use another term; people synonymously use it with strengths, called talents. We'll also discuss this more in the following lecture. So, how do you differentiate between character strengths and talents? Now talent is something more innate. You may have some inherent ability to do something. Somebody may be very talented; there may be some innate talent for painting or something like that. This is more of a talent-side thing. Some people already have inner capability. It's more innate. That capability already comes from the person's inner abilities. Character strengths are less innate than others. The more we develop them as we grow in our lives. It may have some innate aspect, but it is less innate than talents. When you talk about character strengths, these are more voluntary; you learn them, you exercise them, and so on. Talents are not as voluntary. You have specific skills, or you don't. You don't have much control over them. Character strengths are morally valued, as we said. People expect these things from others, so they are highly desirable qualities.

Talents may not have anything to do with morality. So, you may be good at painting or something like that. There is nothing moral or immoral about it. Character strengths are more buildable. You can build them more easily because you have more control over them. Talents are less buildable. Obviously, you can refine them. In the following lecture, we'll be talking more about talents. But sometimes, if you don't have specific talent, it isn't easy to build it because specific innate capabilities must be there. Character strengths has less tangible than consequences. In terms of productivity and other factors, they may not directly reflect that.

Like forgiveness, kindness, and other virtues, these are very good in the emotional sense and quality of life. Still, they may not directly affect performance and other factors.

They have specific character strengths; we'll be talking about that. But talents have a very different value; they're valued more for their tangible consequences. They will have powerful implications for one's performance and life situations, like building wealth, acclaim, and so on. So, if somebody has artistic and leadership talent, their impact will be much more visible in life than in their character strengths.

So, these are some of the differences. Now, how do you assess character strength in psychology or positive psychology? They do a lot of research on character strengths. So, for research, you have to measure them and understand how to measure somebody's character strengths. There are different ways to measure it. One way is that there is something called a VIA inventory of strengths. It's like a specific measurement instrument or questionnaire developed after conducting all this research and based on the VIA classification system.

So, they developed an inventory that people can fill out, and then the scores can be generated based on their different strengths. It is designed for adults and has been administered in five different versions to nearly 350,000 people from over 200 countries. This data may be a little older; this number is growing. They are doing so because it is available on their website, and they're using it for research purposes. So, people across different cultures have used this questionnaire to measure their character strengths. It is a straightforward questionnaire that assesses how much respondents agree with statements representing different character strengths in the classification system that we discussed, using a scale from one to five.

Whether that strength, which they are very much unlike me, means this strength doesn't exist for them. Two, five very much like me, and in between there are two, three, four, whatever it is. So, people can agree on the extent to which it is present in their lives, and based on that, specific scores can be generated. This is more like a self-report measure. Each strength is represented by 10 items, totaling 240 items for each character strength. For instance, the strengths of forgiveness are measured with statements such as, "I always allow other people to leave their mistakes in the past and make a fresh start". Something related to those strengths, and people are asked whether they agree with it or not. Another statement is, "I believe it is best to forgive and forget.", "I am unwilling to accept apologies", reverse code. So, certain items are worded in reverse so that people do not mindlessly score. So, some items may be reverse-scored.

If somebody is mindlessly just filling out, that means they will be caught here if they give a similar score and so on, because one has to understand the sentence and then fill it out accordingly. This is one very popular measure for adults. Another VIA inventory of strength was explicitly developed for youth by Nansook Park. It is designed for individuals aged 10 to 17 years old. So similar to the earlier instrument, it is a straightforward questionnaire that assesses how much respondents agree. The structure is very similar; only some of the items are different. So, VIA youth was created by adapting the age-appropriate items with five to nine items per strength, resulting in 198 items, so there are fewer items than the original VIA to minimize the burden on young respondents. So, thousands of young people across the United States have completed the VIA youth questionnaire, either as a paper-and-pencil survey or through an online platform where parental and guardian consent is required for participation in the research. So, these are, like, one can get scores and understand the different strengths, the dynamics of strengths within each individual, and so on. Some researchers also use a VIA structured interview, where they don't give specific statements; instead, they interview people and ask certain questions, and based on their responses, they can understand their strengths. So, with the assistance of Tiffany Sweher, the VIA structured interview was created to identify signature strengths. What are people's main strengths? Signature strength means the most common strength used by that person. By discussing situations in which this strength is most likely to emerge. So, there are different situations in life, and how they have dealt with them is identified based on that. Some strengths only become apparent when a problem arises in one's life. Otherwise, those strengths are not expressed most of the time, but when a crisis happens, many strengths emerge.

So, they ask such questions to understand what kind of strength they have. For instance, bravery can only be demonstrated in the face of fear, and forgiveness is required when somebody has wronged you; only then does forgiveness become important. In other situations, this may not be expressed. Conversely, different strengths, like kindness or playfulness, can be displayed consistently without specific circumstances. Some strengths, like kindness, may be generally experienced or expressed by people in normal day-to-day circumstances; some specific strengths require extraordinary situations.

So, in this whole interview, they ask about different situations and different, let's say, imaginary scenarios or certain situations they faced, and based on that, they will find out this person has these strengths and so on. Now, this VIA structured interview may take about 30 minutes to complete. The interviewer responded about how the person usually acts in given circumstances,

vis-à-vis the character strengths, whatever they use and focus on, if the setting is detailed, and, in the case of strengths, the situation is described as everyday life. So, if the participant indicates that they display the strength most of the time, follow-up questions are also asked about how they label the strength, whether it truly reflects their core identity, and whether friends and family would agree.

So, like this, they asked probes to find specific strengths, and then did further probing to identify whether these are core strengths. This kind of interview is also done to understand people's strengths. Research shows that most adults possess about two to five signature strengths, which are also reflected in the questionnaire measure. Most of this interview also shows two to five core strengths that many people have, which are called the signature strengths. However, structured interviews have a limitation in that you cannot get a score out of them because this is very subjective. It does not provide any quantitative assessment of individual strengths. However, the advantage is that the VIS structure interview enables us to determine whether a strength is consciously recognized or embraced by the individual. This helps; through the interview, one can understand whether this person consciously recognizes and uses it. From that person's perspective, a more elaborate understanding can be gained from such interviews. These are ways strength can be measured for research purposes, self-exploration, etc.

Now, let us briefly examine how character strengths are linked to well-being. In what ways are they essential for our well-being? Some of the research findings we'll discuss here. So, character strengths have been consistently linked to various measures of happiness and well-being. Identifying and using signature strengths means knowing your core strengths—two, three, or however many core strengths people have. When they identify it and use it more often, it can lead to psychological fulfillment.

Such strength, when they use and recognize it and use it more and more, leads to a lot of psychological fulfillment in their lives. Specific strengths related to well-being and flourishing, such as gratitude, hope, joy, curiosity, and love, have been consistently associated with life satisfaction. Some of these character strengths, 24 in total, are more strongly associated with happiness and life satisfaction, such as gratitude, hope, zest, curiosity, and love. So, these and many others are also important, but this research shows they are more strongly related. Research also indicates that the heart's strengths mean specific strengths related to emotions and heart qualities, such as love and gratitude, which connect people.

So these strengths are connected to connecting with people. These are related to connecting with other people. So that is why they are called strengths of the heart. Research shows that strengths such as gratitude, love, and kindness—those kinds of character strengths—are strongly related to well-being compared to strengths of the head. This means strength is related to all the thought processes, such as creativity, critical thinking, etc. So, people may have strength in many dimensions. Still, character strengths are more typically related to many of these, which are connected to heart qualities, such as emotions and connecting with others. They found that these heart-related strengths are more important for well-being than just the strength of thought processes or the strength of the head like critical thinking, creativity, and so on, they are essential in other aspects, but for emotional well-being, the strengths of the heart are more important. This is what research shows. The strengths of the heart are mostly individual in nature. So, whether you show creativity or critical thinking, it has nothing to do with how you connect with others. Therefore, formal education should encourage both types of strength for holistic development.

Now the problem is that, mostly, what happens is that most of the education system is only related to the strength of the head. They teach you how to think, think critically, and to some extent, be creative. However, the education system doesn't focus on the strengths of the heart. There is no focus on that, while the research shows they are actually more critical in terms of the well-being of life. This thing has to be integrated into the education system. Both the strength of heart and the strength of head should be integrated for the holistic development of children. That is probably something missing in today's education system. So, this research shows that both are very important. Specifically for well-being, the strength of the heart is more important.

Research also shows that the character strengths of perseverance, love, gratitude, hope, and persistence have been linked to academic achievement. Even though some of these strengths of heart may be more emotional in nature and related to connection with other people, research also shows they're actually associated with achievement as well, because they may help you find the right perspective and thinking, the right support from other people, and may also facilitate achievement, such as academic achievement. Strengths of bravery and appreciation of beauty are connected with successful recovery from illnesses. These are specific research studies. This specific strength, like bravery or appreciation of beauty, is more beneficial for,

recovery from illnesses. Spirituality and religiousness are associated with the meaning of life and purpose. People who are more into the spiritual domain of life or some aspect of religiousness report more meaning and purpose in their lives. So, different strengths may serve various functions and may have different outcomes

Now, the last important question is: Can we cultivate character strengths? Is it possible to enhance it? We all may have particular strengths that we can use to some extent, but the more critical applied question is: can we enhance them? So let us address this question. So, everybody has signature strengths, some of which mean we all have two or three strengths regardless of where they may stand compared to others. So, compared to others, one may be low or high; all possibilities are there, but still, we all have some signature strengths. Now, I may have less signature strength compared to, another person. For that comparison, the variation will be there. But regardless of that, we all have those strengths.

This signature strength can be cultivated as we already possess it; enhancing it by exercising it in our daily lives is easier. Now, research shows that this signature strength, whatever strength we have related to character strength, can be enhanced. Because this is how we actually learn them, since we all have them within us, the strengths are already there; they can only be enhanced. So, it is very easy to develop strength because we feel happy whenever we use our strengths, because this is something we are good at, or it is an inbuilt trait within all of us, this is there, and we want to express it. So, there are people who are generally automatically motivated to convey strength. We feel happy whenever we develop such expressed strength because we are good at those things. On the other hand, we feel defensive when we have weaknesses within us all. So, it is much more challenging to work on weaknesses as people lose interest and become defensive about them. Weakness means you are not good at or cannot do something, which becomes your weakness. Many people don't even accept that they have weaknesses, and even if they do accept them, they become defensive about them; they don't want to process them correctly, develop them, etc. So, weaknesses always create problems in terms of learning, additionally removing or working on them is not so easy because of the inherent problem that we don't want to recognize them; we become defensive about them and don't want to accept that we have weaknesses. But strength is very different: we want to acknowledge that we have strength, express it, and accept that we have strengths.

So, in terms of motivation is much easier and more automatic; we can develop it better and faster than by working on weaknesses. In a study, it was observed that people who used their signature strengths for a week in novel ways—meaning they used their signature strengths in various ways—increased happiness and decreased depression at a six-month follow-up compared to the control group, which did not use them. So, these are some of the specific research studies that showed using them at least consciously and in a variety of ways, finding more expression in day-to-day life, led to an increase in their happiness level substantially and a decrease in their depression level, even for one week. This change was even visible after six months. These character strengths are relatively stable and trait-like because when you say something as character strength, it has to be stable.

We cannot say that fluctuating characteristics can be called a character strength. However, they can be influenced by both genetics and environmental factors. Some factors that can influence character strength will be discussed here regarding how they can be influenced. One reason is that research shows dramatic events can increase character strength. Sometimes, when a dramatic or impactful event happens in one's life, such as negative or traumatic experiences, people generally develop more strengths after facing those situations. For example, research shows that the character strengths of faith or religiousness, hope, and love were elevated among US respondents after the 9/11 attacks. A lot of people experienced an increase in strength after the 9/11 attacks, which was a very impactful event that shattered many people's ideas. So collectively, for a lot of people, these strengths were increased. In case of religiousness, they became much more religious, hope, love, and all this increased. Sometimes, a dramatic event can increase some of these character strengths for some people.

Increased strengths of bravery, kindness, and humor after recovery from physical illness. Many people also report severe illnesses when they face and struggle with them, after that, people report more strengths, such as bravery, kindness, and humor, after facing them. So, this kind of event also stimulates the growth of specific strengths. There are increases in the character strengths of religiousness, gratitude, kindness, hope, and bravery after exposure to trauma. After facing a traumatic event, many character strengths, such as religiousness, gratitude, kindness, and hope, also increase, as research shows have increased among people.

So, these various notions about virtue imply that character can be cultivated, and sometimes extreme environmental or traumatic events can also facilitate this. Also, character strength can be cultivated by good parenting, schooling, and socialization. Many of these strengths, or

character strengths, are developed by looking at others, learning from others, and so on. And the first is parenting, which includes the virtues and lessons we learn from our parents, schools, and the overall socialization in our society. All these things will help us develop these characteristics. Positive role models promote the development of good character. What kind of role model do we take? If you idealize some people, and they also exhibit specific good characteristics, naturally, you will be influenced by them, and accordingly, you will develop those characteristics as well. People should be taught specific activities that strengthen them and encouraged to use them daily.

So, the more you use those character strengths, the more obviously they also increase. The more you use them, the more they become visible in one's life. An individualized program for cultivating character based on an individual's character strengths profile may be more effective than a general program for everyone. We cannot have something very general to develop this character strength regarding specific interventions. We need to understand the different character strengths that the person has, and accordingly, it can be customized for that person. These are some ways character strength influences our lives, and they can be promoted.

Now, one of the takes away from all this is that using character strengths more and more in new ways in our day-to-day life enhances those strengths. Let's see more about using signature strengths in new ways. Signature strengths are those few crucial strengths that dominate one's life. So, people generally possess signature strengths that are similar to personal traits. So, we all have specific signature strengths. These strengths reflect our character, qualities that individuals recognize, take pride in, and often utilize. Research shows that nearly everyone can easily identify a few key strengths, typically between 2 and 5. From the list, everybody can identify two to five signature strengths that are very common or dominant among them. Those are called signature strengths.

Some possible criteria for signature strength can be determined using those questionnaires. Some other expressions of this signature strength are that these will be some of its characteristics if you possess a signature strength. If you possess some signature strengths, there will be a sense of ownership and authenticity. You will naturally feel this is the real me when you express it. Let's say that when you show kindness to someone, it feels like this is who you are, as you are naturally kind to people. So, it's like a sense of ownership; you'll be authentic in that kindness. It will not be false kindness. So, the signature strength will be whenever you use it. So, this will be one of the characteristics, and there will be a sense of

ownership and authenticity. There will be a feeling of excitement while displaying particular things at first. So initially, when you show some of the character strengths that are your signature strengths, you will feel a lot of excitement in displaying them and feel happy about it because this is a very positive expression of yourself. Another thing is that there is a rapid learning curve as themes are linked to strengths and practice. If something is your strength, you will learn it easily and quickly. So, there will be rapid learning as this is your strength. So, anything that is aligned with your strengths, you will learn very quickly. So, that is another expression of it. So, new ways to enact the strengths will be continuously learned. You will also do so because strength is something that you want to express more and more. So, there is a possibility of learning continuously in new ways and trying to enact those strengths more and more.

There is also a sense of yearning to act according to one's strengths. You are more likely to feel yearning within yourself. You want to express yourself more and more. So, strengths always want to come out and express themselves. Another thing is that there is a feeling of inevitability in using the strength, as if one cannot be stopped or decided against its display. So there will be a sense of inhibition, so this is something that will come out anyway. The discovery of strength is owned in an epiphany. Sometimes we discover some strength miraculously and it feels like, this is the real me, and it can come as an epiphany. There is an invigorating feeling rather than exhaustion when using the strength. Whenever you use the strength, you feel more energized than exhausted, there is a sense of happiness involved in it.

The creation and pursuit of fundamental projects that revolve around strengths. People are also more likely to pursue projects and actions that revolve around their strengths. The last one is that there is an intrinsic motivation to use the strength. So generally, there is an internal desire to express those strengths intrinsically because strength is something that we all like to express, as we are good at those things. So, these are some of the expressions or criteria by which we can understand whether something is our signature strength. If these characteristics are present, this is our signature strength, if any strength is associated with any of these or some of these expressions. So, using signature strengths in new ways has shown to have long-term positive effects on happiness.

The more you use them, the happier you feel. Here are some specific recommendations drawn from the list developed by Jonathan Haidt, Tayyab Rashid and Afroze Anjum. So, there's a list

there. For example, to give you some examples, how can we, let's say, if you find particular character strengths as your signature strengths, use them in various ways or new ways to develop them? These are some examples that I will be listing now. For example, authenticity and honesty are essential. You find that one of your strengths is authenticity or honesty. How can I use them more in daily life to enhance them? For example, to increase that, you can refrain from telling white lies to friends. To increase authenticity, try to avoid telling lies as much as possible so that will improve your sense of authenticity and honesty. Show it more and more if you have that strength, even if the situation is compelling, try to refrain from telling lies. Think about your most essential values and do something every day that is consistent with them. So, what does authenticity mean? If you value something, try to do something about it daily, and your behavior should be consistent. If you value something, you should not just talk about it; your actions also have to be oriented towards it. Then your authenticity will increase. When explaining your motives to someone, do it genuinely and honestly. When you express them, if honesty and authenticity are your qualities, show them in your expression and your explanation to someone. In your words and actions, things should be reflected. The more you reflect on them in life situations, the more they will develop. Let's say "bravery." How can you use it in various ways if it is your signature strength? One is picked up for an unpopular idea in a group. So that also needs bravery, let's say. If everybody is saying something and something is unpopular, but it still has to be spoken, stand up and speak. So that will also increase your sense of bravery. Protest to the appropriate authorities about any apparent injustice that you observe. Whenever such a situation arises, when injustice happens, try to stand up and protest against it. If bravery is your signature strength, do something you would not ordinarily do because of fear.

So many times, we don't do many things because of fear. But try to do some of these things that were being stopped by fear to increase your bravery. These are some of the ways to suggest specific strengths. Forgiveness, for example, if you have any grudges against people or about anything, try to forgive, one by one, at least. So that will increase your strength of forgiveness. When you feel annoyed, even with justification, take the high road and do not tell anyone how you feel. So even if you feel irritated and hostile, it is still justified. Take the high road and do not tell anyone how you feel. So, don't expose or impose your problems and emotions on others. Write a few forgiveness letters, do not send it but do read it every day for a week. So even if you cannot send or sell directly, at least write about it if you want to forgive something or somebody. That also helps you process and mentally grow in terms of forgiveness.

Gratitude, some of the ways could be to keep track of how many times you say thank you during the day and increase the number every day. So basically, try to express more gratitude whenever a situation arises. At the end of every day, write down three things that went well and for which you are grateful. Write and send a gratitude letter to people you want to thank, and so on. So, these things will enhance your sense of gratitude. Curiosity, for example, can lead you to attend a lecture on a topic about which you know nothing or less. So, curiosity can be expressed in many ways or developed by reading about or attending lectures on topics you don't know much about. Go to a restaurant featuring cuisines unfamiliar to you, discover new places in your town and learn about its history. So, curiosity will be expressed in those terms, but more specific suggestions on how it can be done will be needed. These are some ways we can cultivate various character strengths or signature strengths. Research has shown that the more you use them, the happier and more emotionally well-being you will have. So, with this, I will stop here. Thank you.