

Burkeman Sample Essay #8

The future is uncertain but people are able to choose how to react and respond to it. When children are young, people tell them to be more optimistic and look at the bright side of any situation; people believe that that will make their children happier and more successful. However, recent studies by Oliver Burkeman argue that “negative visualization” is more beneficial than “positive visualization” because it creates a more tranquil state of mind for an individual.

Although focusing on “negative visualization” seems counterproductive in achieving happiness, Burkeman believes finding “calm indifference in one’s negative emotions and experiences” is more productive than excessive optimism. An important aspect of negative visualization is to emphasize the possibility of losing something or someone important in your life; the possibility of this loss puts greater value on the person or object allowing one to cherish it more. Margaret Atwood’s *Handmaid’s Tale* exemplifies how negative visualization can be used to bring happiness to an individual. *The Handmaid’s Tale* follows the life of Offred; she failed to realize and enjoy true happiness in her life until she lost everything one day. In her current situation, Offred is limited to living with a Commander with the sole purpose to give birth; however, before the change, Offred had a family that she loved and freedom that she needed. Offred did not believe that she would lose her family and freedom and did not think of her past situation as one that brought her happiness. If Offred thought of the possibility of losing her family and freedom while she still had them, she would have cherished and enjoyed it more. Now that she no longer has either of these aspects of her life, she understands how happy she was. Burkeman’s philosophy of negative visualization proves to be applicable in this novel because focusing on something pessimistic, such as losing family or freedom, really can help a person realize their happiness and find tranquility in what they have.

Burkeman also claims that “positive” visualization causes more anxiety and problems because reality always falls short of people’s expectations. An example of a situation similar to this is when I have a track race. If I am nervous for the race and try to use positive visualization, I would tell myself, “I am going to win first place. I can do this.” However, if I use negative visualization I would say “It is okay if I rank lowest in my group.” When the results show that I received second place, and I believe in negative visualization, I would feel happier than if I used positive visualization. The use of positive visualization would have made me feel as if I lost the race, when in reality I still succeeded.

I believe that Burkeman's ideas on negative visualization are not applicable for everyone and different methods benefit people differently. For instance, some people set high goals and standards for themselves and because of their personality, they will not accept anything less. Burkeman states that people "subconsciously confuse imagining success with having already achieved it." however this is not true for everyone. My sister Tiffany wants straight A's in her classes and uses positive visualization to picture herself achieving this goal. The emotions she believes she will feel once she has all A's motivates her to work harder. Burkeman believes that if Tiffany visualized achieving her goal, she would not work as hard because she feels as if the goal is already met. Burkeman's practices are not applicable to every aspect of life and vary results depending on the person.

Personally, I believe that a life solely driven by negative visualization will have a mentally damaging impact on an individual. Constant negative visualization will alter one's personality into always focusing on negative beliefs and failing to realize the positive points that are already there in the moment.

Over all, in the large image of one's life negative visualization makes a person happier because it lowers expectations and allows life's small victories have greater weight and value. Positive visualization should be incorporated in some parts of people's lives in order to find balance and true tranquility.

SCORE: This essay received a score of 4.

RUBRIC LANGUAGE: A 4 paper is satisfactory, though uneven in its delivery. It demonstrates an understanding of the prompt and presentation of a thesis, though that thesis may not be logically positioned or clearly stated. Still, the thesis does have support in the form of examples, though the examples may not be fully developed, and some examples may not directly support or relate to the position and topic. The reasoning may be marginal in some parts of the response, and the response in general will be less developed and accomplished than a 5 paper. A 4 paper demonstrates adequate accuracy in sentence control and sentence construction and adheres to the conventions of written English.

COMMENTARY: Essay 8 uses *The Handmaid's Tale* to show how one character, Offred, would have enjoyed her family, and freedom in her earlier life more had she reflected on the fact that they could be lost as indeed in the novel they are. The essay also uses the experience of running track to show how the writer's envisioning the worst-case scenario would leave them satisfied with a second-place finish rather than

a first. And finally, the essay uses a sibling's quest for straight As to show that negative visualization isn't in fact for everyone. Ultimately, the writer thinks that some positive visualization will provide "*balance and true tranquility*" which offers a qualified opinion in response to Burkeman's points. In short, the examples are functional and appropriately connected to Burkeman's ideas, and the paper also demonstrates adequate control of sentence structure, word choice, and grammar.