

## Three Characteristics

Insight Meditation South Bay

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### Key points

- These three qualities are what meditators contemplate in insight (*vipassanā*) meditation. Seeing experience in terms of these three characteristics is seeing things as they actually are—impermanent, unsatisfactory, and devoid of fixed essence (self).
- The clear perception of the impermanence (*anicca*) of phenomena leads to insights into the unsatisfactory and empty nature of things.

Three Characteristics	Notes (See also <i>The Noble Eightfold Path—Right View</i> )	Detailed contemplation (See the <i>Visuddhimagga</i> , Chapter XX, 18-20)
1. <i>Anicca</i> — impermanence	All conditioned phenomena ( <i>sankhāra</i> ) are impermanent, momentary, and ever-changing. In meditation, we observe the ceaseless arising and passing away of the Five Aggregates ( <i>khandha</i> ) of form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness.	10 terms: impermanence, disintegrating, fickle, perishable, unenduring, of a changing nature, coreless, extinguishable, of a mortal nature, formed
2. <i>Dukkha</i> — unsatisfactoriness	Usually translated as “suffering” or “distress,” <i>dukkha</i> refers to both the gross and subtle unsatisfactoriness of the Five Aggregates. Mental and physical processes do not provide lasting happiness. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Dukkha-dukkha</i>—Ordinary suffering; physical pain and mental stress. Sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair; association with the unloved; separation from the loved; and not getting what one wants.</li> <li>2. <i>Vipariṇāma-dukkha</i>—Suffering as produced by change. Even pleasant phenomena are bound to change or end; this suffering is our reaction to the ending of pleasant phenomena, and the stress of uncertainty as things change.</li> <li>3. <i>Sankhārā-dukkha</i>—Suffering as conditions; also described as suffering inherent in the nature of our existence itself, or the suffering of constructions. Associated with the creation of self, this aspect of <i>dukkha</i> often manifests through the mind’s tendency to establish concepts and construct a storyline obscuring the incessantly changing, and empty nature of all conditioned phenomena. To grasp this dimension of <i>dukkha</i> is to realize that we are part of a world compounded of unstable conditions, in which pain and pleasure, happiness and suffering are all bound up together in various ways.</li> </ol>	25 terms: suffering, a disease, a misery, a tumor, a dart, an affliction, a disaster, a fearsome thing, a plague, a menace, no protection, no shelter, no refuge, murderous, the root of calamity, a danger, tainted, Mara’s bait, of a born nature, of an ageing nature, of an ailing nature, of a sorrowful nature, of a lamentable nature, of a despairing nature, of a defiled nature

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3. <i>Anatta</i> —not-self	<p>To qualify as a “self” (soul, essence, atman, etc), something must have a permanent, fixed quality and be under the control of a person. The insight into <i>anicca</i> denies both of these factors – all elements of experience are impermanent and ever-shifting. There is nowhere to stand, and nothing that can claim to ultimately be I, me, or mine.</p> <p>While <i>anicca</i> and <i>dukkha</i> apply to conditioned phenomena (<i>sankhāra</i>), <i>anatta</i> applies to <i>all</i> phenomena (<i>dharmas</i>) – that is, even <i>Nibbāna</i>, although unchanging, is devoid of self.</p>	5 terms: not-self, void, alien, empty, in vain.