

# The Three Characteristics: Imperfect, Impermanent, and Impersonal

## INQUIRY GUIDE – PATRICIA ROCKMAN

SUFFERING	EASE	PERMANENCE	IMPERMANENCE	SELF	NON-SELF
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discontent</li> <li>• Wanting/not wanting/wanting things to be different</li> <li>• Aversion</li> <li>• Resistance</li> <li>• Avoidance</li> <li>• Preferences – liking/not liking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance</li> <li>• Patience</li> <li>• Open to what is</li> <li>• Bringing curiosity</li> <li>• No attachment</li> <li>• Trust</li> <li>• OK with uncertainty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeking certainty</li> <li>• Wanting to know</li> <li>• Always</li> <li>• Never changing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everything changes</li> <li>• Everything comes and goes</li> <li>• Witnessing the arising, persisting and passing of experience</li> <li>• (Internalizing that things do pass – having the bodily experience)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personalization – It’s all about me</li> <li>• Why me?</li> <li>• I, me, mine</li> <li>• Story telling** (Narrative self-referencing)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commonality</li> <li>• Universality</li> <li>• Interconnected</li> <li>• Impersonal</li> <li>• Interdependent</li> <li>• Self not fixed – also always changing</li> <li>• Self as process</li> </ul>
HOW IT SHOWS UP IN INQUIRY					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I don’t like</li> <li>• This should not be</li> <li>• It’s too much</li> <li>• I don’t want it</li> <li>• I won’t</li> <li>• If only</li> <li>• It doesn’t work</li> <li>• Doubting – it or me</li> <li>• Frustration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observing</li> <li>• Describing</li> <li>• Tracking</li> <li>• Surprise</li> <li>• Not as expected</li> <li>• Noting a shift</li> <li>• Allowing</li> <li>• Accepting</li> <li>• Willing to have</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Predictions or fixed view - implications</li> <li>• This is how it is</li> <li>• I’m just like that</li> <li>• It’s always like that</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tracks experience</li> <li>• Noticing shifts</li> <li>• Belief in thoughts changes</li> <li>• Emotional tone changes</li> <li>• Attitude changes experience</li> <li>• Like/dislike-contingent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perfectionism – having to get it right</li> <li>• Negative self-importance (I’m so awful)</li> <li>• Comparing</li> <li>• Identifying with-thoughts, emotions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good enough</li> <li>• Neither so good nor so bad – ordinary</li> <li>• Loosening from it’s about me</li> <li>• Decreased identification</li> <li>• Decentering</li> </ul>

\*Characteristics that increase suffering and limit our view, responses, options vs. the other end of the continuum of characteristics that we are highlighting

\*\*Negative, narrative self-reference is the default vs. Experiential self-reference that we are cultivating

## ABOUT THE THREE CHARACTERISTICS

The Three Characteristics are a Buddhist concept that we have adapted to assist our inquiry. These characteristics are typically referred to as Suffering, Impermanence, and No-Self. These refer to the fact that life is imperfect (there is suffering), impermanent and insubstantial. When we want things to be other than they are or do not accept this imperfection – we suffer. When we cling to certainty or do not recognize the impermanent nature of existence, we also suffer; and when we are too attached to a sense of self or a fixed view of self, we also suffer versus when we can relate to self as process or see the insubstantiality of all things.

Here we have developed a table for the teacher to use as a guide for inquiry. Listening for how suffering – ease; permanence – the recognition of impermanence and a fixed sense of self – self as process (non-self) show up in practice.

## CAN YOU THINK OF OTHERS?

Feel free to add other thoughts, emotions, sensations, or behaviours in the empty columns when you notice ones that are relevant