Summary of the Three Marks of Existence

(Textbook pages 20-25)

According to the AQA specification you need to know:

* ‘The Three Marks of Existence:

1 impermanence (anicca)   
2 no fixed self (anatta)   
3 unsatisfactoriness of life, suffering (dukkha).’

Vocabulary

**dukkha**  - suffering/unsatisfactoriness

**anicca** - impermanence/everything changes

**anatta**  - people and animals have no fixed soul/no self

**the five aggregates** - five aspects that make up a person

**skandhas** - aggregates

Buddhism teaches that there are **three aspects** to everything that exists, whether living things or non-living things:

1. Imperfection (dukkha)
2. Temporariness (anicca)
3. No soul/self (anatta).

This means that in Buddhism everything is unsatisfactory/suffering, everything is temporary/will pass away and nothing/nobody has a soul or continuing identity. These are called **the Three Marks of Existence**.

Buddha taught **seven states of suffering**:

1. birth
2. old age
3. sickness
4. death
5. sorrow & despair
6. contact with unpleasant things
7. not getting what you want.

**1. Dukkha (imperfection/unsatisfactoriness/suffering)**

There are **three types of dukkha**:

1. **Suffering** – physical/mental/emotional
2. **Change** – This means unhappiness caused by thing like moving house, getting older, change in the weather.
3. **Attachment** – This means losing possessions, people or activities that you are attached to. It includes craving things you can’t have.

**2. Anicca (temporariness/impermanence/change)**

This means **impermanence**. Everything is changing all of the time. Even mountains and land mass will change over a period of thousands of years.

Anicca affects the world in three ways:

1. **Living** things - An acorn becomes a tree and is no longer an acorn. It will eventually die.
2. **Non-living things** – Iron goes rusty. Buildings gradually fall apart.
3. **Our minds** – Our thoughts, feelings, ideas, & behaviour change during our journey from early childhood to adulthood to old age.

We suffer because we expect not to change or we don’t want to change but have to.

Story of Kisa Gotami

Kisa Gotami was a woman whose child died. She was so upset she refused to believe it. She went to the Buddha for help who told her to find a mustard seed from a house where nobody had lost a relative and bring it to him. Every house she went to had lost a grandparent, parent, brother, sister or child. Kisa Gotami realised that she was so focused on her own grief that **she had not noticed the grief of others** and that **she needed to let go of her attachment** to her dead child. She became a follower of the Buddha.

**3. Anatta**

‘If all the harm, fear and suffering in the world occur due to grasping on to the self, what use is that great demon to me?’

Shantideva (Indian monk from the eighth century)

This means ‘**no soul**’ or ‘**no self**’. Buddhists believe nobody has an unchanging personal identity. People do not have souls and when someone is reborn it is not the same person, exactly.

This is why Buddhism’s afterlife is called **rebirth** because reincarnation is the same soul coming back again with the same identity. Hindus and Sikhs believe in reincarnation.

**The five aggregates (skandhas)**

People are made of **five parts**:

1. **form** (bodies);
2. **sensation** (feelings);
3. **perception**; (recognition of what things are);
4. **mental formations** (thoughts);
5. **consciousness** (our awareness of things).

Buddha taught that these are constantly changing. When a person dies **their kammic energy passes on into another being** in rebirth.

Nagasena & the chariot

This is a story about anatta. About 200 years after the Buddha a monk arrived at the court of a Greek king, Milinda. The king asked the monk his name and he said he was called Nagasena which was only his name and not any reference to his real self or person. When asked what this meant he said that it was like a chariot that is made up of different parts like the wheels, the axle or the yoke. **If you dismantle the parts it is no longer a chariot**. So it is with people and their ‘self’.

Possible exam questions: Highlighted questions are from the textbook.

1. Explain two examples of dukkha from the life of Buddha. (4 marks)
2. Explain two different types of dukkha. (4 marks)
3. Explain two examples of how pleasure being temporary leads to dukkha. (4 marks)
4. Explain two reasons why dukkha is not just suffering. (4 marks)
5. Explain two of the Seven States of Suffering. In your answer you must refer to scripture. (5 marks)
6. Explain two examples of how anicca can affect non-living things. In your answer you must refer to scripture. (5 marks)
7. Explain two ways in which anicca can lead to dukkha. In your answer you must refer to scripture. (5 marks)
8. Explain two reasons why Buddhists believe there is no permanent self. In your answer you must refer to scripture. (5 marks)
9. Explain two of the Five Aggregates. In your answer you must refer to scripture. (5 marks)
10. Explain two examples of anatta. In your answer you must refer to scripture. (5 marks)
11. ‘For Buddhists, dukkha is the most important of the three marks of existence. Do you agree? (12 marks)
12. ‘Change is the main reason people suffer.’ Do you agree? (12 marks)
13. ‘We all have souls.’ Do you agree? (12 marks)
14. ‘You cannot understand dukkha without understanding anicca.’ Do you agree? (12 marks)
15. ‘If we all understood anicca properly we would all suffer less in our lives.’ Do you agree? (12 marks)
16. ‘The story of Kisa Gotami has no relevance for modern people.’ Do you agree? (12 marks)
17. ‘Rebirth is the best explanation of life after death.’ Do you agree? (12 marks)
18. ‘Without a soul all life is meaningless.’ Do you agree? (12 marks)