

GENERAL INFORMATION FOR POTENTIAL ANAGARIKAS (POSTULANTS)

(UK OR AN EU NATIONALITY)

Thank you for your enquiry about coming to live in the monastery.

Amaravati, Cittaviveka (Chithurst) and Harnham (Aruna Ratanagiri) are Theravadan Buddhist monasteries originating from the Forest Tradition of Thailand. They are places of teaching and practice for people in monastic or lay life. These communities consist of a Sangha of Bhikkhus (monks), nuns, male novices and male and female postulants (anagarikas); there are also both long and short-term lay residents.

The heart of our life is a spiritual aspiration to realise the cessation of suffering, and so meditation, silence and enquiry into Dhamma are a central aspect of our practice. The ethical standard we keep emphasises personal integrity and blameless conduct, which are important both as a basis for the direct experience of religious truth and also for harmonious community living.

For lay men on their first visit a maximum stay of a few days is allowed. For overseas visitors this may be impractical so, for them, a longer visit of up to three to four weeks can be arranged. All visitors are expected to follow a basic code of conduct and the monastic routine, which may vary slightly at different times of the year (see enclosed leaflets or visit our website at <http://www.amaravati.org>).

ANAGARIKA TRAINING

It may be that your main interest in coming to Amaravati is to become an anagarika. This is a noble aspiration and we encourage your interest in the spiritual path. However, joining the community is a gradual process that takes time and may extend over several visits, and, until a late stage, we make no promise that you will eventually be accepted as a candidate for anagarika ordination. For this reason it is very important that you come with provisions (money, alternative plans, etc.) in case it does not work out.

THE PROCESS FOR ACCEPTANCE FOR ANAGARIKA TRAINING IS AS FOLLOWS:

- a) After having stayed for one month you may discuss the possibility of extending your stay as a guest. This would be up to a maximum of three months.
- b) After several months—during which you will have had a chance to see how our community works and we will be beginning to get to know you— if you still think that the anagarika training would be supportive for your practice, and are both willing and able to live with the community, you may approach the Bhikkhu Sangha formally to ask permission to be considered as a candidate to be an anagarika.
- c) At this point we will discuss with you whether we think that you will fit in to the community and benefit from this form and training. You will receive one of three replies - "Yes", "No", or "Maybe". The process will vary from individual to individual. Sometimes we will ask candidates to go away for a period, perhaps a few weeks or months, to consider whether or not they want to proceed, and to come back and stay longer as a lay guest, or we may ask you to spend time at one of our sister monasteries. Depending on your visa status in the UK you may anyway need to leave to renew or obtain the right to stay longer in the country, and many candidates will have other practical arrangements they will need to make before coming to live here longer.

As an anagarika, you will have the opportunity to develop a life of service rooted in simplicity and morality as a means of bringing about insight and peace of mind.

STANDARDS FOR ANAGARIKA ORDINATION

If you are thinking of undertaking the anagarika training you need to be able to:

1. TRAIN IN KEEPING THE EIGHT PRECEPTS AND LIVE ACCORDING TO THE CONVENTIONS AND STANDARDS OF THE COMMUNITY.

These are:

- i) To refrain from killing or harming any living being.
- ii) To refrain from taking what is not given.
- iii) To refrain from any kind of sexual behaviour.
- iv) To refrain from unskilful speech, which includes: lying, abusive or slanderous speech, harmful or divisive speech, gossip and idle chatter.
- v) To refrain from intoxicants.
- vi) To refrain from eating after mid-day.
- vii) To refrain from entertainments and beautification. This includes music, games and shows, wearing jewellery, perfumes and cosmetics or inappropriate clothing.
- viii) To refrain from using luxurious bedding and over-indulging in sleep.

2. KEEP THE MONASTIC SCHEDULE, WHICH INCLUDES:

- i) Morning and evening pujas, and meditation vigils on observance days;
- ii) Silent meditation retreats which are undertaken by the community at certain times of year;
- iii) Attending community meetings;
- iv) Undertaking daily chores, practical responsibilities and other forms of work;
- v) Walking: we lead an active lifestyle;
- vi) Routine: our days are long; we rise at 4 am and often do not retire until 10 p.m.
The daily routine involves meditation, work and group meetings;
- vii) Morning and evening pujas, and meditation vigils on observance days.

This monastic form is a life of renunciation. Our style of dress and living quarters are simple, and we eat only the food that is provided through the generosity of the lay people. For people who are used to being independent, one of the greatest renunciations is not being able to do what one likes or come and go as one pleases. Learning to live with little privacy and to consider the needs of the community, often before one's own, requires a lot of letting go.

Service is a very important part of the anagarika training. The fundamental service that you can offer is to support the discipline of the monks and nuns by undertaking duties that they are prohibited from carrying out. These include: driving, cooking food, and handling money. In addition, the monasteries have many maintenance requirements, administrative duties, publication responsibilities and large grounds that need care and attention.

3. MAKE A ONE YEAR COMMITMENT (from the time of taking anagarika precepts)

During this year it is important to leave aside outside responsibilities and interests, in order to place yourself under the spiritual guidance and direction of the abbot and senior monks. After this year, if you feel more inclined to practise in lay life, you are of course free to do so. If on the other hand, you find that the life is nourishing to your practice you may ask to continue your training as an anagarika. After about one year as an anagarika it may be possible to take up the intermediate stage of training as a samanera. In this training one wears the ochre robes like the bhikkhus but only has ten precepts including not handling money. After at least a year as a samanera it may be possible to ask to be accepted for the bhikkhu training.

THE LIFE REQUIRES GOOD PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

We have a long and full day, with sometimes a lot of work, and do not eat in the afternoon. We often walk to the nearest village (four miles or six kilometres away) so you need to be able comfortably to walk this distance. Also, as the climate is cold and damp and we live in close proximity to one another one must be strong both mentally and physically and able to tolerate a certain amount of stress: thus a degree of emotional maturity is essential.

If you suffer from some kind of ailment that would prevent you from following our routine or living on one main meal a day, then it may be that you would not be considered a suitable candidate. If you are healthy now but know about some kind of medical condition that is likely to degenerate, we would need to know about it and discuss the situation. For this reason, we are now asking that anyone wishing to be an anagarika provides a statement of their health from their doctor, and we also ask that you visit a dentist and optician for check-ups and attend to any issues before you come. We do not have the capacity to accept people who are HIV positive. If you have received psychiatric treatment at any time or have had a mental breakdown, we would need to know the details about what happened, and whether you are still undergoing treatment or are on medication. For some mental problems this way of practice is not helpful.

Long term residents in the UK are eligible for many free medical treatments through the National Health Service. However, the rules on eligibility for free treatment can be complex, although they depend largely on how long you have been in the country and the type of treatment. If you are coming from a European Economic Area country with a EHIC card, or a country with a reciprocal agreement with the UK, you may be eligible immediately on arrival, but you should check and if necessary consider taking out travel insurance to cover yourself against medical costs for the first months of your stay. Even when there is free cover within the UK this does not extend to all services and there are charges for dentists, opticians and most medicines, all of which can be very expensive. We therefore recommend that before you come to the UK you have a dental check-up and an eye-test, and attend to any issues that need treatment before coming.

The www.adviceguide.org.uk/nm/index/family_parent/health/nhs_charges_for_people_from_abroad.htm webpages give more information about NHS entitlement for non-UK nationals..

AGE

Age twenty to forty-five is the usual age range.

We have found that in general the difficulties of adjusting to monastic life increase with age. For this reason people who seem most suited to this lifestyle tend to fall between the ages of twenty to forty-five. However, if a person outside this age range is able to adapt then exceptions can be made.

EXPENSES

In addition to the above considerations you will need to have enough personal funds to support yourself for the duration of your visit as a guest, and the period of anagarika training should you be accepted for this. This may be a period of two to three years or longer.

Your own personal expenses would include postage stamps, telephone calls, medical and dental treatment and medical insurance, as well as any transport costs on occasions when you are travelling for personal reasons. The community provides almsfood, lodging and some basic requisites when they are available e.g. soap and toothpaste.

CLOTHING

Modest, loose fitting clothes are suitable. As it is a cool and damp climate bring some warm clothes. You will need thick woollen socks, a warm hat, gloves, warm underwear, a rain jacket, sweaters as well as strong waterproof shoes or boots. It is also helpful to have shoes that slip on and off easily as you enter and leave the buildings (most of us wear sandals). You will also need some working clothes. As a guest jeans or work trousers and regular outdoor wear are suitable.

Should you undertake the postulant training, you will wear white robes, under which white sweaters, trousers, T-shirts, socks etc. are worn so think of that when you are gathering up your clothing. Your robes and any other items that you do not have can be sewn here or borrowed from the monastery if they are available in our stores.

HOW TO PROCEED FROM HERE

Monastic life can be a powerful and useful tool for freeing the heart, but it is clear that it is not the way for everyone. Over the years we have come to recognise that, even with the very best intentions, some people are not naturally suited to this lifestyle.

We realise this letter isn't particularly inspiring or encouraging. Our intention is simply to make you aware of some of the challenges involved in order to enable you to make a more considered choice before committing yourself. If you have any questions regarding the above information please do not hesitate to contact us.

If you wish to come to the monastery for a visit please contact the Guest Monk and let him know of your situation and the time you wish to come.

In whatever you decide we wish you well in your spiritual aspiration.

Yours in the Dhamma

The Bhikkhu Sangha