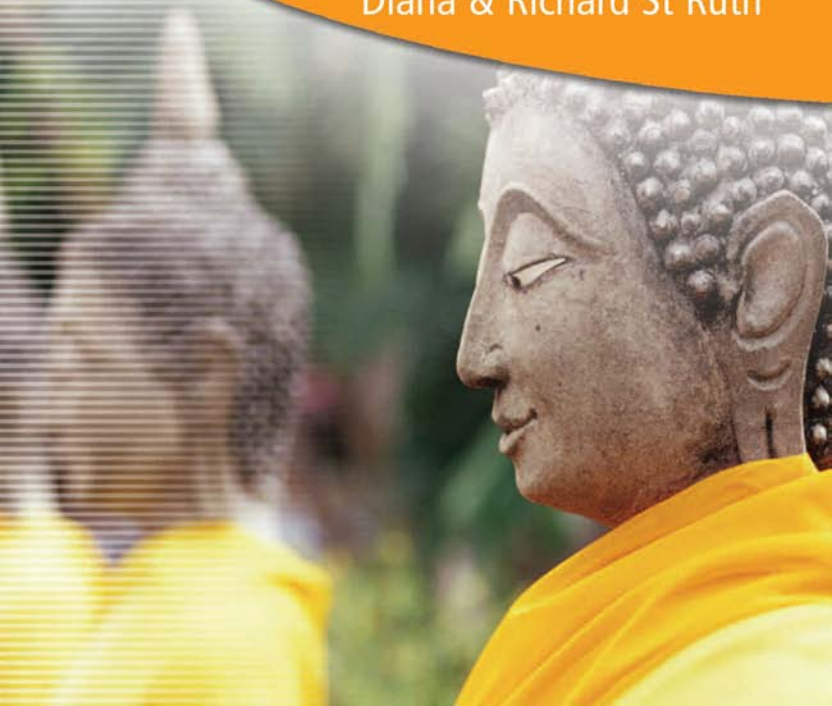


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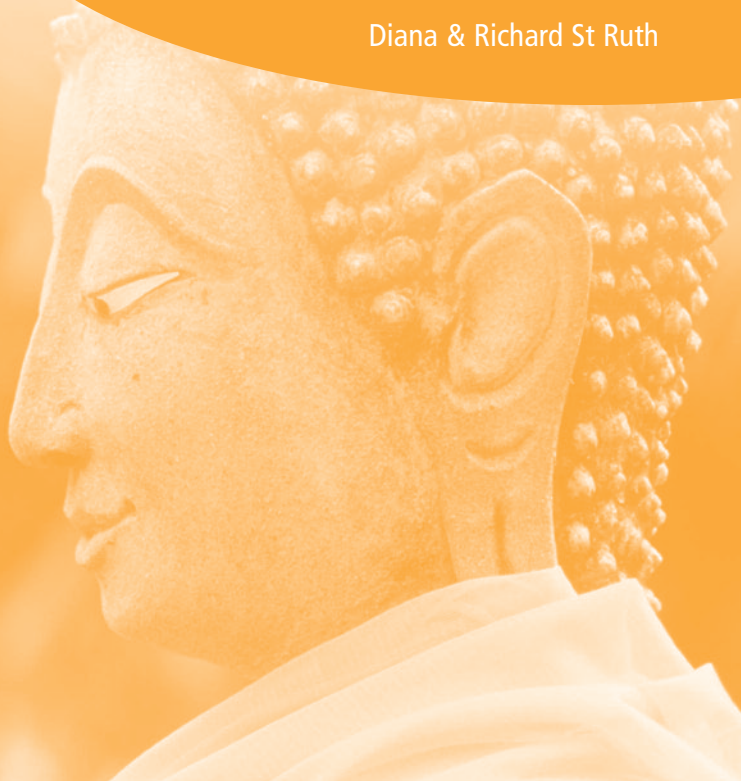
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☺ Buddha in teaching pose. © Photo: Richard St Ruth

Theravada is the Buddhism of Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar (Burma), Laos and other Southeast Asian countries.

It is the oldest school of Buddhism that exists today, and the texts which have been preserved, known as the Pali Canon, are believed to contain some of the original teachings of the Buddha. Theravada means Way of the Elders. It is also known as the Southern School of Buddhism.

In general, Theravada is a devotional, gentle form of Buddhism, with emphasis on generosity. Its teachings are based upon tolerance, mindfulness, morality and insight which lead to wisdom, compassion, and liberation from suffering. Its form is centred upon the monastic system, a system which interacts closely with the lay community.

The interest that Theravada has stimulated in the West is twofold – (i) in the cultural and monastic traditions which have evolved over the centuries and are being practised to this day, and (ii) discovering the wisdom which lies within its teachings and attempting to apply them in a modern, Western context.

DIANA AND RICHARD ST RUTH
Sandwell, Devon.



☺ *Bodhi Leaf from a descendant of the tree
under which the Buddha became enlightened*

History

Roots in India

Buddhism has its roots and origins in India, a land which has a long and rich history of religion and culture going back to ancient times.

During the thirteenth century BCE the Indo-Iranians (Aryans), a branch of the Indo-Europeans, invaded northwest India. As a result, the Indo-Iranian holy texts, the *Vedas* (compiled between the fifteenth and the sixth centuries BCE) and the Vedic tradition were gradually assimilated into the older beliefs of the Indian people. Between the sixth and seventh centuries BCE this combination of beliefs gradually developed into what became known as Brahmanism.

It was in this atmosphere of strong cultural traditions and religious beliefs, more than 2,500 years ago, that Siddhattha (the man who was to become the Buddha) was born and embarked upon his spiritual career.