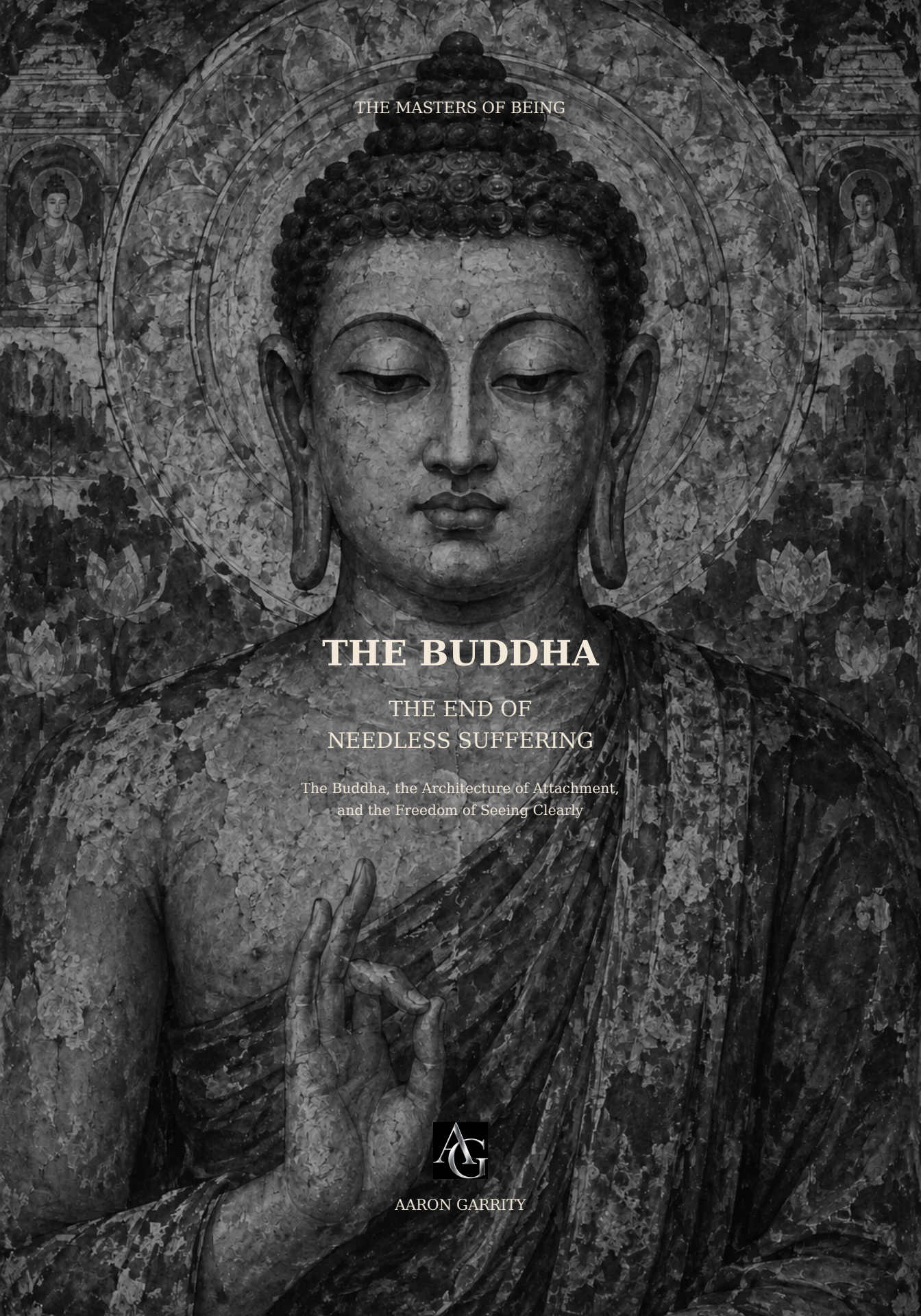

THE MASTERS OF BEING

THE BUDDHA

THE END OF NEEDLESS SUFFERING

The Buddha, the Architecture of Attachment, and the Freedom of Seeing Clearly

AARON GARRITY

THE MASTERS OF BEING

The Buddha

The End of Needless Suffering

AARON GARRITY

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Contents

The Palace We Build Against Loss 5

The Failure of Extremes 15

The Architecture of Attachment 23

The Second Arrow 34

Love Without Possession 46

Ambition Without Captivity 49

The Freedom of Seeing Clearly 54

When the Hand Opens 65

A Note on Sources and Language 72

The Paintings

The Palace of Every Comfort 7

The Life Within the Walls 10

The Encounter with Impermanence 13

The End of Striving 17

Beneath the Bodhi Tree 26

A Home Untouched by Loss 36

The First Teaching 57

The Open Hand 68

The Path Continues 74

PRÓLOGO

THE PALACE WE BUILD AGAINST LOSS

As we make our way through life, loss introduces itself in forms we do not yet know how to name. For a child, it may be a favorite toy that cannot be found, a grandparent whose chair is suddenly empty, or a friend who moves away. As the years pass, the stakes deepen. A relationship changes. A parent dies. A child leaves home. A business ends. The stability we trusted reveals that it was never a promise. Loss changes its clothing, but the question remains: What do we do when life no longer resembles the future we had already begun to inhabit?

When I was a boy, my grandmother lived with Parkinson's disease and was often in and out of the hospital. More than once I heard that she might be near death, and more than once she returned home. Then, while I was away at a summer music program, my mother called with the same warning. This time, something in me knew I needed to go.

I walked into a cold hospital room. My mother and my aunt were already there. My grandmother lay with her eyes closed, tubes down her throat and machines helping her breathe. There were no words available to her. There was only the sound of the equipment, the stillness of the room, and the sight of a woman I loved suspended between presence and departure. I began to cry.

My aunt, who was a music teacher, said quietly, "Why don't you sing for her?" Music belonged to our family. My grandfather had been a professor of music. My grandmother had taught it, and when she cared for me as a small child, we sang together in the car on the way home.

So I sang the pieces I had been studying, and then the songs my grandmother and I had once sung together. In the middle of one of them, she began to hum. Then she tried to sing. Her body was failing, but for a moment the music found the part of her that illness had not silenced. The gift had begun with her, passed into me, and now returned when speech was no longer possible.

That night she passed.

The grief was real. But it was not the whole truth of that room. The ending did not erase the life that came before it. It gathered that life into a final exchange: what she had given me came home to her. I may have learned there, long before I had language for it, that sorrow and gratitude can occupy the same human heart.

My education in loss has moved through more than one world. I grew up with very little and did not understand that we were poor. Later, I experienced extraordinary abundance and the responsibilities that accompanied it. This is not a story of having everything and then losing everything. That would not be true. It is the story of discovering that neither scarcity nor opulence exempts a human being from change.

I have lost people, relationships, expectations, business ventures, and forms of life into which I had poured years of conviction. I have also watched new life emerge after endings that once appeared final. For much of my life, I believed suffering came primarily from what life took from me. I understood disappointment, betrayal, and the collapse of things once believed permanent. What I understood less clearly was how much suffering came afterward.

Pain came through what life altered. Needless suffering came through the mind's refusal to release what reality had already changed. There is the loss itself. Then there is the argument we continue having with it. The Buddha built his teaching inside the distance between those two things.

Before he became the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama was a protected son. According to tradition, his father feared a prophecy that the prince might abandon the throne for a spiritual life, so illness, aging, and death were kept outside the palace walls. Youth surrounded him. Beauty entertained him. Every visible condition suggested that sorrow could be managed by keeping it out of sight.

The palace was more than a residence. It was an argument: if life were arranged carefully enough, perhaps nothing unbearable would enter. Human beings have been rebuilding that palace ever since. We build it through wealth, romance, reputation, achievement, family, certainty, and the future we quietly assume will arrive. We build it whenever we ask something temporary to make us permanently safe.

For a time, the palace works. That is what makes it convincing. Success can change the conditions of a life. Money can provide freedom, care, and opportunity. Love can give existence a depth it would not otherwise possess. There is nothing enlightened about pretending these things do not matter.

But none of them can promise permanence. A trusted person betrays us. A relationship changes. A parent dies. A child suffers. The body begins revealing the passage of time. A future we had already inhabited in imagination refuses to become the life that arrives.

One business I helped build for nearly twenty years ended abruptly in a sale. I had to decide which truth would become the whole story: the ending, or the years of growth, expansion, and changed lives that preceded it. Both were true. The ending deserved grief. It did not deserve exclusive ownership of the meaning.

What I discovered beneath that ending was something innate in all of us: the ability to create again. What once moved through us has not necessarily vanished because one form has closed. Capacity survives form. Imagination survives disappointment. Life may dismantle what we built without removing the builder within us.

Fatherhood makes that truth more tender, not less. A new father holds a child and almost immediately begins furnishing the future: school doors, protection, accomplishment, heartbreak, the person this small life may become. Love begins in the present, but the mind reaches ahead. Years later, when the child leaves home, sadness is only one side of the moment. The whole truth includes the years of nurturing, the conversations, the lessons, the hugs that came freely, and the ones distance made impossible.

If we look only at the leaving, we abandon the life that made the leaving meaningful. To love a child is to encounter beauty and impermanence at the same time. Nonattachment does not require loving less. The Buddha did not awaken because he stopped loving life. He awakened because he stopped demanding that life remain unchanged in order to be loved.

That distinction lies at the center of this writing. Attachment is not devotion. It begins when love becomes possession, purpose becomes identity, or an outcome becomes the condition upon which we grant ourselves peace. We can become attached not only to people, but to explanations, apologies, positions, and former versions of ourselves. Some wrongs require justice. Some relationships require repair or distance. Acceptance does not declare harm acceptable. It means seeing what has happened clearly enough to decide what life asks of us now.

Siddhartha's protected world was broken open by four encounters: an old man, a sick person, a corpse, and a spiritual seeker. Whether the events unfolded precisely as tradition remembers them matters less than the recognition they contain. The prince who had been surrounded by curated youth suddenly saw a body bent by age. He saw illness make a stranger of the body. He saw a corpse and understood that rank could not negotiate with death.

> **Each sight removed one wall from the palace within him.**

Then he saw a wandering seeker. The man possessed almost nothing, yet carried a composure the palace had been unable to manufacture. The first three encounters revealed the conditions of human life. The fourth revealed a possibility: perhaps age, illness, separation, and death could be met without allowing them to destroy the consciousness that met them.

This was not pessimism. It was contact with reality. Most of us experience our own four encounters. Life eventually introduces us to what our private palace was designed to conceal. Our first response is often to repair the palace. We find another relationship, another ambition, another structure of certainty. We tell ourselves the problem was not attachment, only that we attached ourselves to the wrong person, company, dream, or outcome.

Sometimes that is true. Discernment matters. But beneath the correction, a deeper demand may remain: This time, I will build a life that cannot be taken from me.

There is no such life. This does not mean we should stop building. Build the company. Love the person. Raise the children. Defend what matters. Create something worthy of remaining after you are gone. But do not bury your freedom inside what cannot remain.

Pain will still come. Grief may be the honest price of having loved. Trauma cannot be dismissed with a spiritual phrase, and the teaching becomes cruel if it blames people for every suffering they endure. But pain is not the whole story. There is what happens to us, and there is what the mind continues doing with what happened. It repeats the injury, rehearses the argument, constructs an identity around the wound, and waits for a past that cannot return.

Pain enters. The mind builds it a home. The Buddha's path begins with the possibility that this second structure can be seen. What can be seen clearly no longer has to govern us unconsciously. That is awakening in its most human form: not escape from ambition, love, fatherhood, leadership, or desire, but freedom from requiring any of them to tell us who we are.

The question is not whether we can avoid losing what we love. We cannot. The deeper question is whether love can mature beyond possession, whether ambition can survive without captivity, and whether a human being can meet change without allowing every change to become a collapse of the self.

Siddhartha left the palace carrying that question. His life became an answer. But reaching it would require him to lose every false version of freedom first.

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