

# Keats and the Dharma

C a s e H i s t o r i e s o f L i b e r a t i o n



Reading Edition

## Keats and the Dharma

*Case Histories of Liberation*

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### About This Edition

This book presents a sequence of **case histories of liberation**, pairing poems by John Keats with selected early Buddhist discourses. The pairings are designed for slow, comparative reading rather than critical commentary. Explanatory material has therefore been kept to a minimum so as not to interrupt the reader's direct engagement with the texts.

Buddhist passages are rendered with attention to clarity, internal coherence, and contemplative use; in some instances, functional readability has been favored over strict literalism while preserving the order and sense of the original sources.

### Textual Note

The poems of Keats are presented in lightly normalized reading editions. Case and punctuation have occasionally been adjusted for readability and alignment. These changes do not alter wording.

### On Terminology

A small number of Pali and Sanskrit terms are left untranslated where no single English equivalent is adequate or where usage is well established. Examples include *Buddha*, *Dharma*, *Nibbana*/*Nibbāna*, *Karma*/*Kamma* *Samsāra*, *Arahant*, *Sutta*/*Sūtra*. These terms are used sparingly and consistently.

### On the Use of Historical Titles

The expressions *the Buddha* and *Tathāgata* are used in their historical and textual sense, as they appear in early sources, to refer to the awakened teacher traditionally known as Siddhattha Gotama. Their use is descriptive rather than devotional.

### Reader's Note

This book is intended to be read slowly. Readers may wish to pause between pairings or return to a single pairing over time. No prior knowledge of the Dharma, nonduality or Romantic Period poetry is assumed.

Reading Edition, 2026

# Keats and the Dharma

C a s e   H i s t o r i e s   o f   L i b e r a t i o n



1   e n c o u n t e r i n g   s u f f e r i n g

Yet poesy,	Then
though a fine thing,	as now,
cannot be deep or true	I speak
but as the soul	only
may be in suffering	of suffering
and the poet be a sage	and
a humanist,	the end
physician to all men.	of suffering.

# On Suffering

- 1 *encountering suffering*  
*from the Fall of Hyperion*  
*Alagaddūpama Sutta (Simile of the Snake)*
- 2 *fear of time*  
*When I Have Fears*  
*Bhaddekaratta Sutta (An Auspicious Day)*
- 3 *giving sorrow a name*  
*To—*  
*Salla Sutta (The Dart)*
- 4 *glimpses of awakening*  
*Hymn to Delphic Apollo*  
*Buddha Sutta (The Awakened One)*
- 5 *what the teacher bears*  
*On Seeing a Lock of Milton's Hair*  
*Bhāra Sutta (The Burden)*

# On the Making of Suffering

- 6 *making and remaking experience*  
*Culavedalla Sutta (Inquiry on Fabrications)*  
*Physician Nature*
- 7 *sensing and reacting*  
*Culavedalla Sutta (Inquiry on Perception and Feeling)*  
*Fanny*
- 8 *building a self*  
*Culavedalla Sutta (Inquiry on Self-Identification)*  
*To Hope*

# Capability (the mind at work)

- 9 *habit and inheritance*  
*To Maia*  
*Brahmajāla Sutta (The All-Embracing Net)*
- 10 *shaping the moral self*  
*Ode to Olympian Apollo*  
*Brahmajāla Sutta (The All-Embracing Net)*
- 11 *memory and continuity*  
*Bards of Passion and of Mirth*  
*Brahmajāla Sutta (The All-Embracing Net)*
- 12 *speculations at the tavern*  
*Lines on the Mermaid Tavern*  
*Brahmajāla Sutta (The All-Embracing Net)*
- 13 *when constructions fail*  
*Robin Hood*  
*Brahmajāla Sutta (The All-Embracing Net)*
- 14 *false freedoms of the imagination*  
*Fancy*  
*Brahmajāla Sutta (The All-Embracing Net)*

15 *conditioning*  
O Goddess  
*Brahmajāla Sutta (The All-Embracing Net)*

## Negative Capability

16 *the mind as fane*  
Ode to Psyche  
*Karaniyamettā Sutta (Loving-Kindness)*

17 *composure and non-interference*  
On Indolence  
*Nibbāna Sutta (Unbinding)*

18 *no refuge in pleasure*  
Ode on Melancholy  
*Dharmacakṣappavattana Sutta*  
(Setting the Wheel of Dharma in Motion)

19 *the edge of absorption*  
Ode to the Nightingale  
*Eight Realizations of Accomplished Beings*

## Unbinding (with residue)

20 *form and stillness*  
Ode on a Grecian Urn  
*Perfection of Wisdom Sutta*

21 *remains of the day*  
To Autumn  
*Kaccānagotta Sutta (Right View Beyond Extremes)*

	To those gathered at Sāvattthī, the Buddha said, “I will describe to you an auspicious day.”
When I have fears that I may cease to be before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain;  before high-pilèd books in charactery hold, like rich garnerers, the full-ripened grain;	‘One such as this, on that day, does not strain toward what has not yet come nor cling to what has passed—  be it with unsatisfied desire regret, or hunger for fulfilment.
When I behold, upon the night’s starrèd face, huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,  and think that I may never live to trace their shadows with the magic hand of chance;	thoughts and feelings are recognized as fabrications—  not promises to be fulfilled, nor expectations to be met.
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour, that I shall never look upon thee more—  never have relish in the faery power of unreflecting love—	When tremors of passion rise and fall, one realizes how swiftly contact dissolves,  that the ache of loss is felt as sensation, and not a tale of ‘my’ or ‘mine’.
then on the shore of the wide world I stand alone  and think till love and fame  to nothingness do sink.	Still, not becoming, One such as this drifts Neither forward into hope nor backward into regret;  There is nothing to add and nothing to carry. Thus craving and sense of self  are quieted.’

3 giving sorrow a name

	Without a sign, the life of each is difficult and short, suffused with unsatisfactoriness.
What can I do to drive away remembrance from my eyes? For they have seen— ay, an hour ago—  O my brilliant queen.  Touch has a memory.	Once born, there is no escape from distress, unease, or affliction. Such is the fate of all who exist.  What the potter throws become shards; Just as when fruit ripens there is fear of its falling, so do mortals, always becoming, fear death.
What can I do to kill it and be free in my old liberty?  when every fair one that I saw was fair enough to catch me in but half a snare— not keep me there?	Knowledge of mortality is a burden not easily endured.  All are destined for death: Young and old, foolish and wise.
when, howe'er poor or particolour'd things, my muse had wings and, ever ready, was to take her course, whither I bent her, force unintellectual, yet divine—	When afflicted or dying, stories of leaving this world for the next do not protect anybody, parents, children, friends or family.

Divine  
what  
sea-bird  
o'er the sea  
is a philosopher  
the while he goes  
winging along  
where the great water throes.

How shall I  
do to get anew  
those moulted feathers?  
O mount once more above—

above the reach  
of fluttering Love  
and make him cower lowly  
while I soar?

Shall I  
gulp  
wine?  
O  
That is vulgarism—

a heresy and schism  
foisted  
into the canon law of Love.

No.  
Wine is only sweet to happy men.  
More dismal cares seize on me unawares.  
Where shall I learn to get my peace again?

All  
sit in mourning.  
Yet all are mortal,  
ambling  
like cows  
to slaughter  
on a path  
toward old age and death.

Perceiving neither the path  
by which one comes or goes,  
nor its beginning or end,  
one laments without purpose.

The wise, therefore,  
do not sorrow,  
having understood  
the way of the world.

A confused person  
might derive benefit from lamenting  
even while injuring himself.  
A wise person might do the same.  
But peace of mind is not obtained.

Weeping and sorrowing  
create even more suffering,  
harming both body and mind.

One becomes thin and pale,  
inflicting injury  
upon  
oneself.



to banish thoughts  
of that most hateful land,  
dungeoner  
of my friends?

that wicked strand  
where they were wreck'd  
and live a wretched life?

that monstrous region,  
whose dull rivers pour ever  
from their sordid urns unto the shore,  
unown'd of any weedy-haired gods?

whose winds, all zephyrless,  
hold scourging rods  
iced in the great lakes  
to afflict mankind?

whose rank-grown forests,  
frosted black and blind,  
would fright a dryad?

whose harsh, herbagèd mead  
makes lean and lank  
the starv'd ox while he feeds?

There, bad flowers have no scent,  
birds no sweet song  
and great, unerring Nature  
once seems wrong.

For some sunny spell  
to dissipate the shadows of this hell!  
Say  
they are gone!

Such action  
will not sustain peace.  
Lamentation  
is useless.

Sorrowing  
incurs  
even greater suffering

until one is  
overcome  
by the flood  
of distress.

Those  
about to depart  
will fare  
according to their karma

and all who live  
in the shadow of death  
now tremble.

Whatever is expected  
or conceived  
is otherwise.

Loss  
then absence  
is the way  
of the world.

One may live  
for a hundred years or more.  
Only the sense of loss persists  
when they are gone.

With the new dawning light  
steps forth my lady bright,  
O Let me once more  
rest my soul  
upon that dazzling breast!

Let once again  
these aching arms be placed—  
tender gaolers of that waist—  
and let me  
feel that warm breath  
here and there  
to spread a rapture in my very hair.

The sweetness of the pain:  
Give me those lips again.  
Enough!  
Enough.

It is enough for me  
to dream  
of Thee.

Having understood,  
one should stop lamentation  
and, having witnessed departure,  
recognise that one cannot  
bring back the dead.

Just as if one's home were on fire  
they would extinguish the blaze with water,  
a sensible person—  
wise, learned, skilled—  
would quickly blow away arisen sorrow,  
as does the wind  
a tuft of cotton.

Lamentation, complaint and dejection:  
Dispel them.  
Seek happiness for oneself.  
From one's self draw out the dart.

Having thus overcome sorrow  
and attained peace of mind,  
one is quenched.

*4 glimpses of awakening*

Those gathered at Sāvattḥī  
asked the Buddha,  
“What is the difference  
between one who is self-awakened  
and one who is wisdom-liberated?”

The Buddha replied,

God of the golden bow  
and of the golden lyre  
and of the golden hair  
and of the golden fire:

“The Buddha is the One  
who gives rise to the path  
where none had arisen,  
who reveals the path  
where none had been revealed,  
who teaches the path  
previously unseen.

Charioteer  
round the patient year:  
Where—  
where slept Thine ire  
when, like a blank idiot,  
I put on Thy wreath,  
Thy laurel, Thy glory,  
the light  
of Thy story?

One liberated independently of a teacher  
and who establishes the path;  
who, through dispassion,  
is disenchanted with form;  
who is released through dispassion,  
stilled through cessation,  
and freed from clinging to form  
is considered  
‘self-awakened’.

Or was I  
a worm  
too low,  
creeping  
for death,  
O  
Delphic  
Apollo?

One liberated through guidance  
is wisdom-released;  
who, through dispassion,  
is disenchanted with form;  
who is released through dispassion,  
stilled through cessation,  
and freed from clinging to form  
is considered ‘wisdom-liberated’.

The Thunderer grasp'd and grasp'd,  
the Thunderer frown'd and frown'd,  
the Eagle's feathery mane  
for wrath became stiffen'd;  
the sound of breeding thunder  
went drowsily under,  
muttering  
to be unbound.

O  
Why didst Thou  
pity and beg for a worm?  
Why touch Thy soft lute  
til the thunder was mute?  
Why was I not crush'd—  
so ignorant a germ—  
O Delphic Apollo?

The Pleiades were up  
watching the silent air;  
The seeds and roots in Earth  
were swelling for summer fare;  
The Ocean, its neighbour,  
was at  
his old labour.

When—  
who, who did dare  
to tie like a madman  
Thy plant round his brow?  
and grin and look proudly  
and blaspheme so loudly  
and live for that honour  
to stoop to Thee now,

O

Delphic  
Apollo.

One 'self-awakened',  
disenchanted with feeling,  
perception and mental fabrication,  
released through dispassion,  
unbound through cessation,  
and freed from clinging  
to feeling, perception, and fabrication  
is thus rightly liberated.

One wisdom-released,  
disenchanted with feeling,  
perception and fabrication,  
released through dispassion,  
unbound through cessation,  
and freed from clinging  
to feeling, perception, and fabrication  
is considered 'wisdom-liberated'.

One rightly liberated,  
disenchanted with consciousness,  
released through dispassion,  
unbound through cessation,  
and freed  
from all clinging to consciousness,  
is thus rightly self-awakened.

One wisdom-released,  
disenchanted with consciousness,  
released through dispassion,  
completed through cessation,  
and freed from all clinging to  
consciousness,  
is considered  
'wisdom-liberated'.

The rightly liberated One,  
knows the path,  
is expert in the path,  
and brings others to it.

Those who keep to the path  
become endowed with the path."

Chief  
of organic numbers,  
Old Scholar of the Spheres:  
Thy spirit never slumbers  
but rolls about our ears  
forever.

When  
craving  
faded  
into  
desirelessness,  
and cessation

And forever O  
What a mad  
endeavour  
worketh he who,  
to Thy sacred  
and ennobled hearse,  
would offer  
a burnt sacrifice  
of verse and melody?

Unbinding,  
subtle,  
deep,  
fine  
and  
hard  
to see;  
Those stained  
by desire,

How heavenward  
Thou soundedst,  
live Temple of sweet noise  
and discord unconfoundedst,  
giving delight new joys  
and pleasure nobler pinions.

whose view  
is obscured  
by the veil of self,  
will not see  
what goes  
against the stream.

O  
Where  
are Thy dominions?  
Lend Thine ear  
to a young Delian's oath:  
"Ay, by Thy soul; By all  
that from Thy mortal lips did roll  
and by the kernel  
of Thine earthly love:  
Beauty in things on earth  
and things above.

I  
considered  
this Dharma  
I have attained:  
profound,  
difficult  
to recognise,  
difficult  
to realise,  
quiet and  
excellent.

When every  
childish  
fashion  
has vanish'd from  
my rhyme

will I,  
grey-gone in passion,  
give to an after-time  
hymning and harmony of Thee  
and of Thy words  
and of Thy life.

But vain  
is now the burning  
and the strife.  
Pangs are in vain.  
until I grow high-rife  
with old philosophy  
and mad with glimpses  
at futurity.

For many years my offerings  
must be hush'd.  
When I do speak,  
I'll think upon this hour.  
because I feel  
my forehead hot  
and flush'd, even  
at the simplest vassal  
of Thy power.

Coupled so,  
unaware  
yet at the moment,  
temperate  
was my blood:

A lock  
of Thy bright hair!  
Sudden it came  
and  
I was startled  
when I heard Thy name.

Methought  
I had beheld it from the flood.

Clear  
to the wise,  
subtle,  
unconstrained by  
thought:

It would be  
tiring  
if I were to teach this Dharma  
to others,  
and be misunderstood  
or ignored.

Most  
are attached  
to time and place,  
and take pleasure in it.  
With such attachment,  
it is difficult  
to see the Dharma  
of conditionality and dependent arising.

Also difficult is  
the cessation of inclination,  
and the relinquishing  
of the sense-bases:  
Why should I now reveal,  
to those governed  
by desire, ignorance  
and aversion,  
this Dharma?

That which I attained with difficulty  
is not easily realised.  
On thinking this over,  
my mind inclined  
to inaction, to not teach.

But upon seeing that a house  
is a place of dust,  
I went  
out into  
the open  
air

and  
wandered.