

# A Brief Discourse on the Merit of Animal-Release and Live-Saving

By Lama Drimed Lodro

Today, I will discuss a few essential elements regarding the merit of the animal-release and live-saving ceremony. This ceremony is widely practiced by all schools of Buddhism. It is a profound method to accumulate positive merit and virtues. Many sutras have quoted the importance of life-release.

According to the Sutra, the act of life-release is regarded as a practice of the Six Paramitas, particularly the perfection of generosity: when generosity is practiced through life-release, it is at its highest form. The merit of this selfless act of generosity is compounded by saving the lives of beings that are about to be killed.

Lord Buddha Shakyamuni also taught that life-release helps one to maintain the buddhist root vow of non-killing at a higher level. This is because it is even more meritorious to save lives than to honor the commitment of non-killing.

Practicing the saving of life also enacts one's precious bodhicitta. The ceremony and the actual release strengthen one's compassion tremendously. Both acts can be viewed as the aspirational bodhicitta and the practical bodhicitta. In other words, through the prayers in the ceremony one cultivates the aspirational bodhicitta, and through the physical act of liberating beings from harm or life-threatening situations, one accomplishes the practical bodhicitta.

The merit from release of life brings much benefit in one's current life as well as in future lives. It invokes longevity, freedom from sickness, merit and good fortune. It also establishes a positive karmic

interdependence with the Buddha and increases one's fervent regard towards dharma. Furthermore, seeds of liberation are planted into the mind stream of these beings that were saved so that the blessing of the Three Jewels is deeply infused.

Life-release is a sublime method to remove one's own and other's life obstacles, to increase the life expectancy of one's guru, family members or friends; one's merit is increased and obstacles in general are pacified. This method further grants one's noble aspirations to be fulfilled and accomplished. Most important of all, it serves as the main cause for accumulating the virtuous merit to become an enlightened buddha. We need to constantly accumulate merit starting from the time when we first take refuge all the way through perfect enlightenment.

Life-release can be performed for the deceased as well. According to a story from ancient India, a powerful king called King Kechen was not only carnivorous but also loved fresh blood. So, many beings were killed due to his negative habits. After dying in that life, he was reborn in the hell realm and experienced unbearable sufferings. Arhat Gengawo, a disciple of Buddha Sakyamuni, traveled to the hell realm through his miraculous power. He witnessed the intense agony of King Kechen. When he returned back to the human realm, he asked the Buddha for an explanation. Buddha replied that the king's great torment was the result of the ripening of his past and immense negative karma. Arhat Gengawo, due to his strong compassion, performed numerous life-release ceremonies and dedicated them to King Kechen. Towards the end, the King was liberated from the hell realm.

According to another story, in many past lives before Buddha Sakyamuni was enlightened, the Buddha was a very kind person with intense altruistic compassion. One day, he walked past a small pond that was drying up. There were ten thousand fish in the pond struggling to survive. So, the Buddha saved them by releasing them into a large lake. Through his powerful prayers and the act of life-release, all ten thousand fish were liberated.

I wish that followers of the supreme Three Jewels will incorporate this teaching through the ceremonial practice called The River Of Nectar Of Great Compassion. This practice is done on a regular basis at Larong Gar, the residence and academic center of the late His Holiness Jigme Phuntsog Rinpoche in Kham. This practice was composed mainly by the omniscient all-knowing Mipham Rinpoche. The potency and blessing of his vajra-words within this practice are remarkable. In Tibet, people perform life-release regularly. Just to mention some benefits, this ceremony can be performed to increase life and merit of one's teacher, self, family and friends, whether they are alive have already deceased. Also, it can pacify obstacles, avoid sickness, bring good fortune, and plant seeds of realization for future liberation.

I sincerely request that followers of the Sole-Protector Buddha Sakyamuni engage this profound activity and to integrate this discernment into the brief life span that is called Samsara.

Colophon:

Upon the request of Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche, Lama Drimed Lodro gave a short discourse on the benefit and merit of performing the release of life ceremony on the occasion of observing the paranirvana of His Holiness Jigme Phuntsog Rinpoche.

In 2004 and in California USA, this teaching was translated into English by Lama Drimed Lodro and Benson Young.

I dedicate all merit and virtue to the swift rebirth of His Holiness Jigme Phuntsog Rinpoche and the swift liberation of my dharma sister, Nai Yuine Ding. May the glory and splendor of the Triple Gems prevail throughout the three realms! - Benson Young