

The Merit from Releasing Live Animals

by Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche

In general, we study karma, the law of cause and effect, in Buddhism. The principle of karma is that if you commit non-virtuous actions you will have bad results and if you engage in virtuous actions then you will have good results. The ten non-virtuous actions can be classified into ten different categories and the opposite of these can be classified into the ten types of virtue.* The first non-virtuous action is the worst, the strongest, and that is to take life, then after that is to take that which is not given or stealing; committing sexual misconduct is another harmful action. These are the first of the bodily non-virtues.

Of the ten non-virtuous actions, really the worst is killing. And the opposite is saving lives. From among all the things one should abandon, first you should abandon killing, and the most important virtue to practice is to save lives. By saving lives you accomplish great virtue; you can protect beings and you can save them from fear. So because of this, of the ten virtues - saving lives or protecting lives - we can either save the lives of humans or that of animals. My teacher in Kham, Khenpo Gangshar, taught me that among these two - saving the lives of animals or of humans - saving humans is not as powerful and the reason for this is that man can speak for and help himself, he or she can do things to improve their situation – we have ways to help ourselves. But animals, on the other hand, are really lost for means to help themselves, they cannot say anything to anyone and they cannot protect themselves from being eaten and tormented, and that is why saving the lives of many animals is really very important.

Now, from among the many different types of animals, in particular fish in oceans, lakes and streams and birds in the sky have neither a lord nor a master - they have no protector, they have no refuge - and so in order to benefit them we buy fish or birds at the market and set them free. That is how we can accomplish the first great virtue, that of saving lives.

Fish on sale at markets all over the world are usually trapped in iron buckets. Also, many, many fish are stuffed and tightly packed into small caskets – no single fish can move and they really have a very difficult time; it is terrible for them and they experience unbearable suffering. And so, after we have bought the fish, we simply lift them out of the containers with our hands and heedfully place them in the ocean or

stream again. Then we watch them swim off – it is as though they have been set free from prison. And while we release the fish we make prayers for the Lama’s long life, we make prayers for the long lives and happiness of all sentient beings, in particular we make prayers for the long life and happiness of those who sponsored the event, that the fish be set free, and in this way tremendous virtue is accumulated.

Furthermore, there is the benefit of bringing blessings to these animals. In general, in their current state they aren’t able to listen to the dharma, they aren’t able to practice meditation, they can’t really see the body of a Buddha. But through the experience of having been released – through the blessings of this act – in the future they will experience freedom from samsara. That is how it brings them tremendous benefits and blessings.

Thank you very much.

May virtue increase!

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放生的意義和功德

佛法說因果定律，講的就是緣；遇到逆緣而行惡道自然自食惡果，當然行善道而必得善報。十惡道分別自十惡業，相反的，就是十善業。十惡道之首是殺生，其次是偷盜，跟著是邪淫，這些都是我們身體行為所犯的罪行。

十惡道之首是殺生，自然十善道之首是放生，所以我們必定要戒殺。救贖生命是十善道之首要，這是積功德的善業。我們保護生命，並使之離怖畏，我們不單保護人類、動物、鳥、魚、蟲、蛇都是我們要保護之列。我的老師康區的堪布京沙曾經告訴我，就救贖人和動物的生命而論，其中以救贖動物更為重要，因為人類可以高聲求助，又可以自行解決，我們都有自救的能力，但是動物不能言，所以未能保護自己被殺害、被虐待和被吃掉之苦；由此看來，保護動物的生命至為莊嚴。

現在，在各種類的動物中，海洋、湖泊、河溪中的魚、蝦、蚌、蠔、蜆等等和空中的飛鳥，牠們沒有首領和導師，沒有皈依之處，所以若要利益牠們，我們從市場上把牠們買下來，然後放生，這就是行十善道之首救贖生命了。

世界上各市場的魚類大多是困在大鐵箱內，又或是很多條堆在一個細小的空間，彈動不得，處於如此困境，實在可憐。牠們要經歷如此傷痛、恐怖和苦難。若然，我們買此魚類，從擠擁不堪的水箱，雙手小心翼翼地將牠們放回所屬水域，讓牠們慢慢地逃出牢獄，游向自由，當放生之時，我們念誦上師長壽祈願文，以此願眾生離苦得樂，長壽自在，當然還要迴向淨資購魚屬的大善長者和所放生的魚。再者，現階段，被放生的動物未能聽懂佛法，也未能參禪修法，也許看見佛像的機會也沒有；但是通過放生法會，通過念誦上師長壽祈願文，通過佛教的放生儀軌，在不久的未來，這些被放生的雀、鳥、魚、蝦，在娑婆世界能享受常隨佛學的自由，這就是參加放生法會的大善長者帶給牠們的好處和祝福了。

謝謝！

願善業增長

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