

A LIVE RELEASE TEACHING BY: The Venerable Lama Chödak Gyatso Nubpa



For many years, Lama Chödak Gyatso Nubpa Rinpoche dedicated himself to the practice of saving sentient beings that are destined to be killed. Many of his “live releases” involved saving baitfish along the coastal areas of southern California. When an increasing number of people became inspired to release beings, Lama Gyatso was requested to explain how and why we undertake this simple, yet profound practice. This teaching took place during an interview on December 29, 2004.

Q: WHY PERFORM A LIVE RELEASE?

It is imperative that any positive karma or virtue that we accumulate be characterized by the three supremes. The three supremes are virtue in the beginning, virtue in the middle, and virtue in the end. Virtue in the beginning corresponds to the right motivation. The essence of right

motivation is that we be free of self-interest. The essence of the second supreme is that our mind be free of fixation (the duality of subject and object). The essence of the third supreme is that we dedicate whatever merit we accumulate to the benefit of countless mother-sentient beings. Any positive karma we create that has these three qualities has a great degree of merit.

Although as sentient beings, we will have some sort of selfish motivation (and it is okay to have such motivation), our primary intention should be to benefit other sentient beings, particularly those who are helpless, those who are completely gripped by ignorance and face an endless chain of suffering. The number of such beings, unfortunately, is inconceivable. With such motivation preceding our actions, any karma we create has great virtue.

Until we recognize the true nature of mind—suchness—all the merit we accumulate can be exhausted. Of all the exhaustible forms of merit, the most supreme is the generosity of relieving others of the fear of losing their lives. From that standpoint, freeing live beings is the most supreme practice of virtue, and hence the fruition is inconceivable. From a relative point of view, our connection to the beings we release is that of observers to some baitfish; as they are not near and dear ones, an aspect of the natural foundation of self-interest is eliminated. Releasing these beings that are destined to die (and are most likely to become a cause of death of other beings as well) is a spontaneous expression of sheer kindness and compassion.

Imagine that we ourselves are one of these baitfish. We would experience all of the aspects of our senses, minus some human faculties. Now imagine that we are pulled out of our natural environment. The process of being captured itself involves the great suffering of feeling suffocated. Then imagine that while we are still alive, a sharp stainless-steel fishhook pierces our body. Imagine the suffering and pain this would cause us. At that time, our only wish is for a swift death. But that does not happen. Finally, when the hook has impaled us, we are thrown backward while the line is cast. Often, we faint from the extreme suffering of pain, and then somehow, due to sheer karma, we again try to get free. But instead, we now become the very cause of the loss of life of a bigger being. Sometimes, if we are fortunate, those bigger beings bite only half of our body and miss the hook, which makes the fisherman furious. He then rips our body apart even while we are still alive. Then the fisherman might either feed us to his pets or throw us back into the ocean. Either way, we'll be eaten and there goes the final phase of our life, causing even more beings to take on the karma of having ended our life.

In addition, we can imagine that we are one of countless baitfish who have been captured and are now swimming in a tank. Finally, after we have undergone great suffering, a generous and compassionate person comes along and buys a scoop of bait to set free from the fisherman's net. In this way, we have the good fortune to be released back into the freedom of the water. Imagine the great happiness we experience by being back in the ocean. Out of great joy, we might even jump. Why not—we've been given a new life!

Similarly, imagine that we somehow get trapped behind bars, either on genuine or on flimsy grounds. After we have spent a long time in prison, the judge and jury pass judgment and our sentence is pronounced: "capital punishment". We and our supporters try every means possible to stay the execution. To have the sentence revoked, we will do almost anything, even fabricate stories, but it is all to no avail. Now imagine that the president, who has suddenly aroused genuine kindness and compassion, has granted us amnesty. Imagine the happiness we and our loved ones would experience. It would be beyond words.

Similar to the benefit created by the president granting amnesty is the benefit of conducting live releases. The only difference is that fish have no one to plead their case. Fortunately, we are not baitfish, nor are we on death row. We have this precious vessel of our human body, and as human beings, we have the ability to offer captive beings the chance for freedom.

In the Buddhist scriptures, we find that countless eons ago, when human beings were perfecting the two accumulations (merit and wisdom), and specifically avoiding causing harm to other beings as well as protecting others' lives, they lived for up to eighty thousand years. It is believed that the degeneration of the life force that has since occurred in humans is caused by the accumulation of non-virtue, particularly as a result of taking the lives of other beings or being the cause of their death. It is said that in the future, when the human life span will be a mere ten years and when the human race is nearing extinction, an emanation of Buddha Maitreya (the future Buddha) will manifest. That emanation will live much longer, be taller, and have all the qualities of a supreme being. At that time, when other human beings ask the reason for his qualities, he will say that he is reaping the fruit of the karma of not taking others' lives but rather saving others' lives. It is said that eventually human beings will stop harming other beings, and their life span will increase from ten to twenty years, and ultimately to eighty thousand years. From this

alone, we can understand the magnitude of the merit of freeing beings that are destined to be brutally killed.

Q: HOW CAN WE OFFER A LIVE RELEASE ON OUR OWN?

First and foremost, recite the prayers of refuge and bodhichitta (great compassion). After that, instantly visualize yourself as any wrathful deity for which you have received empowerment. Within that state of original purity, the state of suchness, avert all the causes of obstacles and hindrances, thereby demarcating the boundary; also instantly visualize the wisdom protection circle, with all the beings to be released within it.

After that, practice a brief purification of these beings, so that their two obscurations (negative emotions and conceptual obscurations) and habit patterns are completely purified. To do this, you may recite any purification mantra, primarily the Vajrasattva or Akshobhya mantra, with the understanding that these beings' karma and obscurations have been purified. If you have any consecrated water, sprinkle it onto the beings destined for release.

Then, instantly visualize in the space in front the Three Jewels: the Buddha, dharma, and sangha; the Three Kayas: dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, and nirmanakaya; the Three Roots: lama, deity, and dakini; and the lineage masters—that is, all the sources of refuge—appearing like the reflection of the stars in the ocean. They are gazing straight at you with compassion. Instantly, call upon the sources of refuge, requesting that the benefactor and everyone directly or indirectly connected to this meritorious live release, including yourself, perfect the two accumulations and purify the two obscurations and all habit patterns. Recite, "I offer this supreme generosity of giving life to the sources of refuge so that all beings (whether directly and indirectly connected) may receive the blessings of longevity and all the qualities of enrichment and wisdom. And also by the truth of the blessings of the sources of refuge and the truth of suchness and the truth of the infallible law of karma, bestow the blessings of the qualities that increase longevity and wisdom and seal them in the life force of these beings that are going to be saved."

At this point, recite all the mantras of longevity that you know and any other precious mantras that liberate upon hearing; for example, the Vajra Seven-Line Prayer, Vajra Gura mantra, the Shi-tro mantra (OM AH HUNG BODHIICITTA MAHA SUKHA GYANA DHATTU AH OM RULU RULU HUNG JHYO HUNG), or the mantra of Akshobhya, Vajrasattva, or Tara. While reciting these mantras, if you have any precious substances (that liberate upon taste) such as amrita, dilute them with water and sprinkle them over the beings to be released. If you don't have such substances, recite mantras and blow onto a container of clean water and then sprinkle this on the beings. If you are ransoming a bigger being, like a cow or chicken, you can put the substance directly into their mouths. At the conclusion, recite any aspiration and dedication prayers that you know.

Those who are not experienced Vajrayana practitioners can perform live releases by focusing on the generosity of giving life to captive beings, by dedicating the merit to loved ones, for their health and for the removal of their obstacles and hindrances, or by dedicating the merit to those who have passed away. They can also reflect on the preciousness of life and rejoice in the celebratory feeling of giving life to many. In this way, they accomplish the state of motherhood like a successful delivery and celebration of the birth spontaneously.

Q: ARE THERE AUSPICIOUS TIMES TO PERFORM A RELEASE?

Every moment, 12 months a year, 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, is a good and auspicious time to accumulate virtue. Specific days that are more beneficial include the first quarter moon (Tara and Medicine Buddha day), full moon (Amitabha day), new moon (Buddha Shakyamuni day), Guru Rinpoche and Dakini days, and all the multiplication days of the enlightened activities of the Buddha. These days are precious because of the multiplication of merit that occurs.

If you are doing a live release for someone who has passed away, you can do so even if he or she passed away decades before. Conducting a live release within 49 days, or, especially, within the first 28 days, after a person's death is tremendously beneficial. The merit becomes like a Map Quest for the deceased, helping guide and support them in the bardo.

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