

The Challenge of Liberating Life

放生的挑戰



By Gregory Lau
Chinese Translation by Yijiang Lin

劉果根 文
林益江 中譯

The Trials of Liberation

The 2016 Ullambana celebration at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas turned out to be a special day for the liberation of life team. Our team here at CTTB had been working hard to develop a new process for liberating life: a process in response to concerns such as environmental and economic impact, ethics, and the humane treatment of animals. We had postponed two liberation ceremonies already, and the ceremony scheduled for Ullambana Day was about to be postponed as well. But with the blessing of Guan Yin Bodhisattva and the Venerable Master, Ullambana Day's liberating life was the first step to modernizing liberation of life practices for the future.

We had initially planned to rescue hens from factory farms, but obtaining chickens was not viable at that time. With one week

放生的考驗

萬佛聖城2016年的盂蘭盆法會對放生團隊來講，是很特別的一天。我們團隊很努力的發展一種新的放生方式。這種新方式會兼顧到環境衝擊、經濟影響、道德和對動物的人道主義等等。我們已經推遲了兩次的放生法會，本來這次盂蘭盆的放生也要延後，但因觀音菩薩和上人加被，這次的放生活動成為放生現代化所跨出的第一步。

最初我們想要從家禽養殖場購買母雞放生，但因種種因素，當時不適合放生家禽。就在法會前一週，我們還是什麼動物都沒選到。次日，我們打算放生少量雉雞，這作為後備計畫看起來更加可行。

因此我請父親幫忙找找三藩市灣區的活體動物屠宰場。



remaining before the liberation ceremony for Ullambana Day, we were out of options. The next day, it seemed more practical to prepare to liberate pheasants in minimal quantities as a backup plan.

So I asked my dad to help me scout for some live meat slaughter markets in the San Francisco Bay Area. He contacted a few places and they said they had a pheasant inventory arriving in time for Sunday. So we prepared to obtain pheasants from one place in Oakland.

With just a few days before liberation, my dad went to visit the shop in Oakland to see if the pheasants were in proper condition for liberation. It turned out there were no pheasants. My father called me to tell me the news. He also told me his observations of the butcher shop — the utter horror he experienced. He told me the butcher shop reeked of blood and death. There were sheep and goats as well, which all looked back at him, making eye contact. They had a look of longing and wishing to be saved. He expressed the heart-wrenching sadness and pity he felt for them.

The *Brahma Net Sutra* states, “Whenever a Bodhisattva sees a person preparing to kill an animal, he should devise a skillful method to rescue and protect it, freeing it from its suffering and difficulties...”

Immediately, I wished those goats and sheep could be saved, but we were in no condition to save them because we didn't have proper preparations or facilities, and none of the sanctuaries in our network were ready to adopt goats. We just weren't ready to rescue goats. Through my dad's eyes, I had seen the goats and sheep in need of rescue, but I had no way to rescue them. The sadness sat in my stomach for the next few days, knowing I could do nothing for them. So I refocused our efforts on purchasing the pheasants for liberation.

I then contacted a second butcher shop in San Francisco, and they confirmed that they did have pheasants. So we prepared payment and transportation. Everything was planned out in detail, ready for pick-up on Sunday morning. However, on Saturday morning, the butcher said they would not have pheasants by Sunday. Everything was going wrong. All our plans were falling apart. I felt like I had failed everyone, myself included.

I had been thinking every day and night for the past month, worrying about the coming liberation of life for Ullambana Day. Now, with one day left, I was ready to give up. I felt I had no merit or virtue to achieve such a



他聯繫了一些地方，那邊的人說他們週日會有雉雞到貨。我們就打算去屋崙的一個地方買雉雞。

就在放生法會的前幾天，我父親去屋崙查看那裏的雉雞是否適合放生。結果發現那裡沒有雉雞。他打電話給我，告訴我這件事，並講了他在屠宰場非常恐怖的體驗。他說那裏瀰漫著血腥和死亡的惡臭。店裏還有綿羊和山羊，都回望著他的眼睛。牠們看起來很渴望被救贖。我父親說這讓他很揪心，他覺得牠們太可憐了。

《梵網經》上說：「若佛子，以慈心故，行放生業。……若見世人殺畜生時，應方便救護，解其苦難。」

task as liberation. I remember asking ShrFu why I wasn't getting the conditions and help I needed to succeed?

Later that Saturday morning, I told my friend about the goats and the sheep as well. She asked, "Why don't you just rescue them?" I told her, "I don't have that kind of money on hand to rescue them last minute. They are sold by the pound and they are quite heavy. Not only that, it takes a lot of preparation, facilities, materials and equipment. We don't have anything."

My friend then said, "Just do it! Make all the calls necessary. Just go for it. I'll give you the cash necessary to take care of it. However much you need, I'll help pay in advance."

I immediately made some calls. I must have called and emailed at least 15 people that afternoon. I suddenly got a full wave of support and assistance. So I called the butcher shop and reserved some 40lbs goats and sheep, trying to rescue as many as I could within the usual liberation budget. Originally, we had no space to house the animals. But recently, the peacock pen was vacated and empty. I arranged to use the pen to house the goats and sheep.

That day, I called everyone to coordinate the entire Sunday operation. Everything was set and ready to go. I couldn't believe it. Everything suddenly came together and all we had to do was wait for Sunday to come around.

Sunday morning, 6:00 AM – The Butcher

Three of our liberation team members loaded the kennels to the back of the pickup truck and set off to the butcher shop in the Bay Area. Upon arriving at the butcher shop, I was immediately met by the stench of blood, animals, and ammonia.

I continuously recited Guan Yin's name and reminded myself of my personal inner mantra: "Like all Bodhisattvas, I must be able to rescue living beings without letting emotions break me. I must bear the pain and suffering of all living beings, and must not quake or be broken from it."

We looked at the group of animals and tried to find those that were 40lbs. I asked the worker to point out the 40lbs animals I had reserved earlier. There were no 40lbs animals. I began to worry because that would mean we would only be able to obtain one animal. So we picked the lightest ones, which were only the goats.

We scoured the group and two caught our eyes. Both happened to make eye contact with us as well. We kept looking around for a 40lbs animal, but for some reason, those two goats stood out.

So we picked one of them out. The worker walked into the pen. All the animals scurried to avoid him. He then grabbed the goat by his horns with his hands and pulled it. The goat screamed

我聽了之後立刻希望可以救牠們，但是我們卻沒有這個條件，因為沒有提前準備，也沒有合適的設施。我們還找不到一個場所適合養山羊，所以還不能救牠們。但通過我父親的描述，我知道需要人救牠們，但我卻做不到。我什麼都幫不上，這讓我接連幾天都很悲傷。那我還是專注點加把油，去買雉雞放生吧。

之後我又聯繫了三藩市另一家屠宰場，他們說有雉雞。我們準備好錢和交通工具，所有的細節都準備好了，打算週日一早就去取雉雞。但到了週六早晨，屠宰場那邊的人說，週日他們還沒有雉雞。一切都打亂了，所有的計畫全泡湯了。我覺得讓所有人都失望了，包括我自己。

過去的整個月，我沒日沒夜的都在琢磨孟蘭盆放生的事。現在只剩下一天了，我打算要放棄了。我覺得自己沒有福德來擔當放生的任務。我記得還請示師父，為什麼我沒有這個因緣可以做成這件事？

週六早晨稍後，我跟朋友講起山羊和綿羊的事。她問我為什麼不救牠們？我說：「我手上沒有那麼多錢救急。牠們是按照磅來賣的，羊很重的。除了這個原因，還需要大量的準備工作，包括設施材料裝備等等。我們什麼都沒有。」

我朋友說：「你去做就是了！趕緊打電話。現在就做。需要多少現金我給。無論你需要多少，我都可以幫忙墊錢。」

我立刻打電話，那天下午我至少打電話或是電郵給15個人。忽然得到了全線支持和幫助。我再打給屠宰場讓他預留大概40磅重的山羊和綿羊，盡量在預算之內多救幾隻。本來我們是沒有地方養羊的，但最近孔雀的圍欄空出來了，所以可安排這個地方當作羊的新家。

那天我打給別人協助我們週日的行動。一切都安排好了，我真是不敢相信。所有的事都忽然就緒，我們只剩下等待週日的來臨。

週日清晨六點 – 屠宰場

我們放生團隊的三個人把狗舍裝載貨車後面，出發去灣區的屠宰場。一到那裡，那種血腥、動物的惡臭、還有阿摩尼亞的氣味撲鼻而來。

我不停地念觀音菩薩，憶念自己內心的咒語：「如諸菩薩，我當救度眾生不被情緒牽累。我當受一切眾生之痛苦，而不搖動退轉。」

我們看著一群動物，想要找到重40磅左右的。我

in fear. It cried out and pleaded for mercy. It wasn't normal bleating. It actually wailed and screamed. I could not show any signs of reaction or emotion, so I maintained an emotionless face. This was a rescue mission and there was no room for emotion. All three of us did very well at hiding our emotions, though it was extremely difficult.

The goat was put on the scale, screaming, knowing it had been picked to be killed. The fear in his eyes shot right through my heart. He shook and struggled in terror.

As the goat was weighed, the numbers on the scale shot up high, weighing him at over 100lbs. I realized I had failed at that point. To my surprise, the worker listed the price for a 40lbs goat. I was taken aback! How could this be? We immediately agreed to the price and proceeded to point out the second goat.

The second goat screamed, trying to struggle free as well. The other animals watched with fear, helpless and unable to change their fate. The worker pushed and dragged the goat, forcing it onto the scale. This goat weighed over 100lbs again and the worker again quoted the price for a 40lbs goat. We confirmed the purchase.

Our truck arrived at CTTB at 11am with plenty of time to spare. We put the two goats into their new pen so they could be acquainted with their new home. At 12:45pm, the goats were back in their crates and taken to the Buddha Hall. There, they met up with three other hens that had been rescued by another sanctuary, and a dog as well. These rescued animals were brought to CTTB especially for the liberation ceremony. The goats sat there in their crates calmly without making even a little noise, attracting all the children and onlookers. The three hens sat behind the goats and the dog and her caretaker sat at the front of the group.

When the ceremony began, I couldn't believe we pulled off such an intricate operation. I couldn't believe all the hard work had paid off—at least some of those animals were saved from a gruesome death. At that moment, I realized we had completed the mission successfully.

I also realized the paramount importance of the practice of liberating life. It is wonderful beyond words. Now I know why the actual heart and effort put into rescuing a living being is so rewarding. It touches our compassion and mindfulness of the sufferings of living beings. It causes us to use and develop our wisdom and skill-in-means, just as all Bodhisattvas had to do when they were on the causal ground. This is the most wonderful Dharma in the world, and we should preserve it so it continues for generations to come. ❀

讓工作人員將之前預留的40磅左右的動物指給我們看。可是並沒有40磅重的。我開始擔心，這意味著我們只能救一隻動物。所以我們挑選最輕的，就只有山羊了。

我們篩選著這群動物，注意到其中兩隻。這兩隻也在回望著我們的眼睛。我們繼續找40磅左右的，但出於某種原因，那兩隻羊就現在眼前。

我們把那其中一隻挑出來。工人走進圍欄，所有的動物都四處竄逃避開他。他抓住羊角往外拉，羊驚恐的尖叫，大聲的哀求著憐憫。不是普通的嘶叫，而是哀嚎尖叫。我不能表現出任何情感或是反應，所以我面無表情。這是一次營救的任務，沒有私人感情的空間，我們三個都很好的隱藏了自己的情緒，雖然這極其困難。

山羊尖叫著被放到秤上，牠知道自己要被宰了。眼裏的恐懼直接擊中我的心靈，牠在恐懼中掙扎發抖。

山羊稱重時，秤上的數字跳得很高，稱出來超過100磅。我覺得這個應該是不行了。出乎意料的是工作人員開出一個40磅的價格！這怎麼可能？我們立刻同意了這個價碼，接著交易第二隻。

第二隻羊尖叫著想要掙脫。其他動物驚恐的看著牠，無能為力改變牠們的命運。工人又推又拉的把牠放到秤上，也是100多磅，工作人員再次開出40磅的價格。我們確認購買。

我們的卡車上午11點到達聖城，還有很多空餘時間。我們將兩隻羊放到圍欄裡，它們可以熟悉一下新環境。午後12點45分，山羊被放進大木箱帶到佛殿。在那裡牠們遇到三隻從其他地方救回來的母雞，還有一隻狗。這些動物被帶到佛殿，參加專門為牠們舉行的放生儀式。羊平靜的坐在牠們的木箱裏，沒發出一點聲音。吸引來所有的小孩子和圍觀的人。三隻母雞坐在後面，那隻狗和看管人坐在前面。

當放生儀式開始時，我簡直無法相信我們進行了這麼不簡單的營救行動。我無法相信所有的辛苦都獲得回報——至少有一些動物從可怕的鬼門關前獲救。那一刻，我意識到我們終於成功完成任務。

我也意識到放生具有至高無上的重要性，妙不可言。現在我知道在營救一個眾生時，真心實意和所有的努力都是這麼有意義。這觸動我們的慈悲，也能了知眾生的痛苦。這讓我們有機會開發自己的智慧和善用所有的方便法門，就像每一位菩薩在因地所行的一切。這是世界上最棒的法門，我們應該保留，並且世代相傳。❀