

## A Time to Protect Life

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation  
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In modern times, many Chinese people perform rituals on certain days to seek blessings. Many of these rituals involve animals, such as offering meat or freeing animals into the wild. Although these rituals are based on good intentions, in reality, they create bad karma.

The Pudu ritual is held on lunar July 15th in which people make offerings to deities, spirits, and ancestors hoping to seek safety and blessings. Its origin lies in [the story of Ven. Maudgalyayana](#), who made offerings on the last day of the summer retreat, which resulted in the liberation of his mother and others who had suffered in the realm of hungry ghosts. Thus, the meaning of Pudu is to save all living beings from suffering. Yet, people began to use the occasion of Pudu to have a feast of meats because historically, people only ate meat or fish on special occasions due to poverty. As the economy improved, people began to make lavish offerings in the Pudu ritual with three or five kinds of meat from animals such as pigs, goats, ducks, chickens, and fish. In reality, making offerings of meat is a cruel act. For example, in the slaughterhouse, animals wail when they are being captured to be slaughtered. Animals have feelings and know that they are about to be killed, thus they struggle and try to run away. When animals are killed, they are filled with fear, hatred, and resentment. This kind of traumatic death leads to seeds of hatred which the animals would bring with them to their next life. By offering meat or eating meat, we commit killing indirectly and form bad karmic affinities with the animals. According to the law of karma, we reap what we sow. From the seeds of hatred sprouts revenge, and the karmic retribution for killing is wars and conflicts. In seeking safety, instead of eating meat and making meat offerings, we should protect the life of others and adopt a vegetarian diet.

Another ritual commonly practiced by people in lunar July is fang sheng 'life release', an act of releasing animals back to nature. Some people practice this ritual because they believe they can gain blessings by saving the life of animals that were captured to be killed. Nowadays, however, this ritual has become a mass freeing of captive animals and birds and fish are now captured for the sake of being released. By purchasing fish for the purpose of life release, these fish must suffer through the pain and agony of being out of the water and handled by humans. Moreover, participants in this ritual chant mantras and pray for blessings prior to freeing the fish, so by the time the fish are released, many have died. Similarly, in the process of capturing birds, many of the birds' wings or legs get broken as they struggle to get free. When it's time to release them, they are close to dying or have already died.

Every creature has its own habitat, and releasing it into a new habitat also decreases its chances of survival. How can an act that would cost the life of an animal bring forth blessings in return? It is better to protect and safeguard the life of living creatures rather than partaking in a symbolic act of freeing them. Therefore, to release life is simply to not kill any living creature.

The rituals of Pudu and fang sheng were both based on the spirit of compassion and for the purpose of liberating living beings from suffering. Over the course of time, these practices have

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deviated from their original intent. The Buddha tells us that, like humans, all living creatures have the Buddha nature, thus all lives are equal. We should be compassionate toward all living creatures. Animals are born as animals due to their karma; we should let them live freely in nature and not interfere with their life. To reduce the karma of killing and the suffering of animals, we should adopt a vegetarian diet, so that fewer animals will be raised and killed. The lunar seventh month is a time for us to rethink these Chinese customs and to adjust our incorrect beliefs. Let us have compassion for animals and develop the wisdom to not partake in rituals that result in harm to animals.

From Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Talks  
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