

To Drink, To Eat, To Be Hungry and To Be Thirsty In Jātakaṭṭhakathā: Meaning in Buddhism¹

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Abstract

This article aims to study the usage of verbs about consumption, such as ‘to drink’, ‘to eat’, ‘to be hungry’, and ‘to be thirsty’, that appear in conjunction with something that is not food; for example, “Best to be full of wisdom” in Jātakaṭṭhakathā. This article also seeks to study the relationship between the dharma message conveyed by this technique and the function of Jātakaṭṭhakathā, the Buddhist text. The data used are ṭṭhakathās on 300 Jātakas. The result reveals that the use of verbs about consuming in conjunction with something that is not food is an implicit food metaphor used to convey the idea that kāma is similar to food. When man consumes kāma, he has a craving. That means, he is hungry or thirsty to consume kāma forever, so craving is the cause of suffering. On the other hand, the intellectual man is full, which means he does not desire to consume kāma, therefore, he has the insight for the cessation of suffering. The implicit food metaphor accomplishes the function of creating the idea of the intellect for the readers.

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Introduction

For every creature, food consumption is the basic activity of survival because food nourishes the body and provides energy. For this reason, food is considered one of the four requisites for humans. Food also relates to human existence in many other ways, particularly in the aspect of religion. That is, food is part of many religious rites. In addition, in some religions there are taboos about food, such as the Muslim taboo regarding eating pork.

Perhaps because in Buddhism there are not as many food taboos as there are in Islam or Judaism, there has been little research about eating or food in Buddhism. One example is “*Eating: in Buddhist Perspective*”³; another is a paper about the Buddha’s eating of horse fodder barley.⁴ This suggests that the concepts of food or eating in Buddhism have not been broadly studied; similarly, there has been little research about ‘real’ eating behavior.

A survey of the Buddhist text Jātakaṭṭhakathā⁵ indicates that there is considerable usage of verbs about consumption, such as ‘to drink’, ‘to eat’, ‘to be hungry’, and ‘to be thirsty’, that appear in connection with something that is not food. Here is an example from Kāma Jātaka:

He that desires a thing, and then this his desire fulfillment blesses, Sure a glad-hearted man is he, because his wish he now possesses. He that desires a thing, and then this his desire fulfillment blesses, Desires throng on him more and more, as thirst in time of heat oppresses.⁶

In the example above, the word “thirst” has two meanings. The first one means the thirst for water, and the second one means thirst for a thing desired. The second meaning of thirst in this example relates to the Dharma, that is, thirst is a craving, a cause of suffering.

³ Somparn, *Eating: in Buddhist Perspective*.

⁴ Park, “The Buddha’s Eating of Horse Fodder Barley”.

⁵ The word Jātakaṭṭhakathā in this article also means the collection of “Bodhisatta Stories” and the word aṭṭhakathā-Jātaka means the commentary of each Jātaka.

⁶ Cowell, *The Jātaka*, Vol. 4, 108.

From the aforementioned explanation, the usage of verbs about consumption that appear with something other than food in *Jātakatṭhakathā* is unique, because it is different from what has been found in previous research.

Therefore, this article aims to study the use of verbs for consumption with something other than food in *Jātakatṭhakathā*,⁷ and to study the relationship between the Dharma message conveyed by this usage and the function of *Jātakatṭhakathā*.

The use of verbs about consumption related to something other than food is an implicit food metaphor to convey that *kāma* is similar to food. When man consumes *kāma*, he has a craving. That means, he is hungry or thirsty to consume *kāma* forever, so craving is the cause of suffering. On the other hand, when an intellectual man is full, that means that he does not desire to consume *kāma*, so he has insight into the cession of suffering. The implicit food metaphor is an important means of conveying the Dharma message; that is, it is the means by which the *Jātakatṭhakathā* accomplishes its function, which is to create wisdom in the reader.

There are many editions of *Jātakatṭhakathā*, and the edition used as data in this article is the Thai version of Mahamakut Buddhist University. This Thai edition of *Jātakatṭhakathā* is called the *Phra Sutta and aṭṭhakathā translation vol. 55-64*. However, the Thai edition has been used in conjunction with the English edition of E.B. Cowell, entitled *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births, Vols. 1-5*, in order to describe the results of the study completely in English.⁸

⁷ The scope of this paper is limited to the verbs about the consumption of food; indeed, in *Jātakatṭhakathā* there is the use of 'taste' with something other than food, for example, 'the taste of desire', and food connotes many meanings in Dharma; for example, meat is *kāma*, poison is *kāma* too. If the forgoing is studied, it would extend the scope of study. The results of study would then show the 'collection of food metaphor' in *Jātakatṭhakathā*. That would be an interesting topic for subsequent research.

⁸ A limitation of this paper is the database "*Jātakatṭhakathā*" that is translated multilingually. The data used is the Thai version of Mahamakut Buddhist University as compared with the English edition of E.B. Cowell. If the Pali version were used as the database, the results of study might be more complete.

In this article, reference is made to the definition of the word “kāma” in *The Pali Text Society Pali-English Dictionary*:

Objective: pleasantness, pleasure-giving, an object of sensual enjoyment; -- 2. *subjective*: (a) enjoyment, pleasure on occasion of sense. Kāma as sense -- desire and enjoyment *plus* the objects of same is a collective name for all but the very higher or refined conditions of life.⁹

Results of the Study

This study found that the use of verbs about consumption with something other than food is evident in aṭṭhakathās on 300 Jātakas. The characteristics of verbs about consumption with something other than food in Jātakaṭṭhakathā can be categorized into three groups. However, the Dharma messages conveyed by the verbs about consumption in each group harmonize with each other.

The results of the study will be discussed in three sections: the characteristics of verbs about consumption with something other than food in Jātakaṭṭhakathā; the usage of verbs about consumption with something other than food – the implicit food metaphor; and the implicit food metaphor and the function of the Jātakaṭṭhakathā.

The characteristics of verbs about consumption with something other than food in Jātakaṭṭhakathā

The appearance of verbs about consumption with something other than food in Jātakaṭṭhakathā can be categorized into three groups by comparing them with words about consumption of actual food: verbs about consumption that indicate the desire to consume; the situation of the consumption; and the condition after consumption.

⁹ Rhys Davids. *The Pali Text Society Pali-English Dictionary*.

Verbs about consumption that indicate the desire to consume

The verbs about consumption in this group are ‘to be thirsty’ and ‘to be hungry’. This verb group appears in the database in only three *aṭṭhakathā* Jātakas: *Dūta Jātaka*,¹⁰ *Kāma Jātaka* and *Javana-Haṃsa Jātaka*. *Dūta Jātaka* will be used to illustrate hunger signifying lust.

Dūta Jātaka is a story about King Dainty. The king always eats extravagantly and shows his people his extravagant eating since he wishes to confer merit upon many people by showing them the costly array of his meals. A certain greedy man saw the king’s manner of eating and wanted to have a taste. Unable to master his craving, he ran up to the king, calling out loudly, “Messenger! messenger! O king.” By this trick he was able to eat extravagantly with the king. After the meal, the king asked him the meaning of “messenger”. The greedy man’s answer indicated the Dharma message about lust by its pun of the word “belly”.

‘O king, I am a messenger from Lust and the Belly. Says Lust to me, Go! and sent me here as her messenger’, and with these words he speaks the first two stanzas:

O king, the Belly’s messenger you see:
O lord of chariots, do not angry be!
For Belly’s sake men very far will go,
Even to ask a favour of a foe.¹¹

In this verse, the reader can realize the Dharma message by examining the meaning of the word “belly”. The word belly is ambiguous. It means “that part of the body which receives food; the stomach with its adjuncts”, and “put for the body in its capacity for food...., the appetite for food.”¹² Understanding the meaning of the word “belly” leads to an understanding of the Dharma message, that is, to realize the difference between hunger, which is physical suffering,

¹⁰ The name of the Jātakas in this article refers to Cowell’s *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha’s Former Births, Vols. 1-5*, even if the word “*aṭṭhakathā*” is not included in the name of Jātaka, every Jātaka is the commentary of Jātaka.

¹¹ Cowell, *The Jātaka, Vol. 2*, 222.

¹² *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 95.

and the appetite as craving, which is mental suffering. In other words, hunger can be relieved by eating, but craving cannot be relieved by eating; on the contrary, eating causes craving to eat continually.

Verbs about consumption that depict consumption

The verbs in this group are ‘to eat’¹³ and ‘to drink’. This group appears most frequently in the database, that is, it appears in aṭṭhakathā on 284 Jātakas. The discussion of the verbs about consumption in this group is subdivided into three subgroups: the verbs ‘paribhoga’, ‘seva’ and ‘sevaya’ to connote kāma consumption; the verbs ‘to eat’ and ‘to drink’ to connote sexual intercourse; and the motif of giving the water of life, drinking, to connote the Dharma teaching.

The verb “paribhoga”, “seva” and “sevaya” to connote kāma consumption

In aṭṭhakathā on 263 Jātakas, the verbs ‘paribhoga’, ‘seva’ and ‘sevaya’ appear in conjunction with many things, not only wrong, but also good: for example, treasure, sexual intercourse, kāma, suffering, consequence (Vipāka), birth (Jāti), Dharma good wording and good friend. In addition, there are 19 aṭṭhakathā Jātakas in which the verbs ‘paribhoga’ and ‘seva’ appear with negative meaning with treasure and sexual intercourse, kāma.

The appearance of the verbs in this group with both positive and negative aspects demonstrates the Dharma message that the wrong or kāma consumption causes suffering; on the contrary, wrong or kāma non-consumption causes the cessation of suffering, similar to good or Dharma consumption. Kimmapakka Jātaka, is a good illustration of both kāma consumption and kāma non-consumption.

¹³ From the database of the Thai version of Mahamakut Buddhist University, the verbs ‘to eat’ includes ‘paribhoga’, ‘seva’ and ‘sevaya’. The word ‘paribhoga’ comes from word ‘bhoga’ which means ‘eating’. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 767. In the case of the words ‘seva’ and ‘sevaya’, even if they do not have a strict meaning of ‘eating’, they also show the meaning of ‘using’, ‘employing’, which implies something taken into the body.

In Kimmapakka Jātaka, the Bodhisatta incarnated as the leader of a caravan. Once, when journeying with five hundred carts, he came to the outskirts of a forest. Assembling his men, he said to them: “In this forest grow trees that bear poisonous fruit. Let no man eat any unfamiliar fruit without first asking me.” When they had traversed the forest, they saw the tree. In form, smell and taste, its trunk, boughs, leaves and fruit resembled a mango. Some of the greedy merchants ate it, but some merchants remembered the word of the Bodhisatta, so that they were afraid to eat it. At the end of the story, the greedy merchants died, and the merchants who followed the word of the Bodhisatta survived.

It was when he had told this story, that the Master, as the Buddha, uttered this stanza:

As they who ate the What-fruit died, so Lusts,
When ripe, slay him who knowing not the woe
They breed hereafter, stoops to lustful deeds.¹⁴

The example above is rich in connotations. The action of eating the poisonous fruit implies the action of kāma consumption; therefore, death connotes the suffering. The characters who do not eat the poisonous fruit demonstrate kāma non-consumption; therefore, survival connotes the cessation of suffering. In addition, the words of the Bodhisatta stand for the Dharma doctrine. All the connotations in this example convey the Dharma message that kāma is like the poisonous fruit causing suffering; however, kāma non-consumption depends on the mindfulness (sati) of man; additionally, the Dharma doctrine is the path leading to the cessation of suffering.

The verbs ‘to eat’ and ‘to drink’ to connote sexual intercourse

Many aṭṭhakathā Jātakas show the characteristic of the mercurial in women. Some of these aṭṭhakathā Jātakas mention a river from which everyone can drink water, such as the Pabbatūpatthara Jātaka. The element of the river may seem incoherent with the other elements, but it has a deep connotation of sexual intercourse.

¹⁴ Cowell, *The Jātaka*, Vol. 1, 213.

In Pabbatūpatthara Jātaka, the Bodhisatta became the king's counselor in matters temporal and spiritual. A member of the king's court became involved in an intrigue with the harem. When the king learnt of it, he was unable to destroy the two wrongdoers, so he put a question to the Bodhisatta. The king's question and the Bodhisatta's answer are:

‘Ask it, O king! I will make answer,’ replied the other.
Then the king asked his question in the words of the first couplet:
‘A happy lake lay sheltered at the foot of a lovely hill,
But a jackal used it, knowing that a lion watched it still.’

‘Surely,’ thought the Bodhisatta, ‘one of his courtiers must have intrigued in the harem’, and he recited the second couplet:
‘Out of the mighty river all creatures drink at will:
If she is dear, have patience – the river's a river still.’¹⁵

To comprehend the Dharma message in this Jātaka, it is necessary to link the story of the king to the story of the lion in the Bodhisatta's answer. The lion is the king and the jackal is the courtier. The happy lake is the king's concubine, whereby the action of the jackal drinking water in the lake means the courtier has had sexual intercourse with the king's concubine. This is a beautiful way to convey the Dharma message that woman can have sexual intercourse with everyone; similarly, everyone can drink the water in the lake. Therefore, the wise man should not be concerned about it and, in order to abandon this action, realize that sexual intercourse is disgusting.

The motif of giving the water of life to drink to connote the Dharma teaching

Even though the verb ‘to drink’ in the example above means ‘to have sexual intercourse’, the motif of giving the water of life to drink means ‘to give someone Dharma.’ This appearance is found in many aṭṭhakathā Jātakas, for example Sarabha-MigaJātaka, and Mātaṅga Jātaka.

¹⁵ Cowell, *The Jātaka*, Vol. 2, 88.

In the Paccupannavaṭṭhu¹⁶ of Sarabha-Miga Jātaka, the Buddha, to the confounding of the schismatics, worked a twofold miracle at the gate of the city of Sāvatti beneath a knot-mango tree. Seven days later, the Buddha gave the gardener a mango seed that grew up suddenly and bore delicious fruit. In the evening, the king of the gods sent Vissakamma and had him make a pavilion of the seven precious things.

The Master, having for the confounding of the schismatics performed a twofold miracle passing marvelous among his disciples, caused faith to spring up in multitudes, then arose and, sitting in the Buddha's seat, declared the Law. Twenty of beings drank of the waters of life. Then, meditating to see whether it was that former Buddhas went when they had done a miracle.¹⁷

The different meanings of the verb 'to drink' in these two contexts has a characteristic implication, discussed in the next section, about implicit metaphor. However, these manifest that every parts consisting in every aṭṭhakathā Jātaka are very fruitful meaning.

The verbs about consumption that indicate the condition after consumption

After a meal, everyone is naturally full; however, one might be so full that he vomits. The foregoing is contrary to the use of the verb 'to vomit' and 'to be full' in Jātakaṭṭhakathā, because the Bodhisatta first vomits kāma; after that, he will be 'full of wisdom'.

Additionally, the verb 'to vomit' always appears in conjunction with bad things, such as lust and greed. The example is Hatthi-Pāla Jātaka, the story about the Bodhisatta who was born as one of the chaplain's four sons. The king was afraid that they would become

¹⁶ Every Jātakaṭṭhakathā consists of the following parts: (1) an introduction of the story, Paccupannavaṭṭhu, (2) a prose narrative, (3) the Gāthās, (4) a short commentary (Veyyākaraṇa), and (5) connection. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, Vol. 2, 115-116.

¹⁷ Cowell, *The Jātaka*, Vol. 4, 168.

the king in his place; therefore, the king and the chaplain inveigled them to enter a religious life. By this means the four sons undertook a religious life, and their parent finally undertook a religious life too. The king ruled over the country, but the chaplain persuaded him to undertake the religious life too. The chaplain said that the property was vomited food:

The birds that ate and vomited in the air are flying free:
 But those which ate and kept it down are captured now by me.
 A brahmin vomits out his lusts, and wilt thou eat the same
 A man who eats a vomit, sire, deserves the deepest blame.”¹⁸

The above example demonstrates the Dharma message by the association of two events much like the preceding example. In order to comprehend the Dharma message, the reader needs to link the same actions of the birds and the Brahmin (the Bodhisatta), namely eating and vomiting. The associated meaning of *kāma* with vomited food also harmonizes with the connected meaning of *kāma* consumption with the eating of food or drinking. This demonstrates that *kāma* is disgusting; furthermore, everyone who wants to follow a religious life needs to abandon *kāma*.

The next example is *Kāma Jātaka*, the story about the king deceived by Sakka (the king of gods), in that Sakka would help the king rule the kingdom. Because of his greed, the king becomes seriously sick. The Bodhisatta, who came to the chaplain, wanted to relieve the king's sickness; to that end, he gave the king the doctrine about being ‘full of wisdom’:

Best to be full of wisdom: these no lust can set afire;
 Never the man with wisdom filled is slave unto desire.
 Crush your desires, and little want, not greedy all to win:
 He that is like the sea is not burnt by desire within,
 But like a cobbler, cuts the shoe according to the skin.¹⁹

¹⁸ Cowell, *The Jātaka*, Vol. 4, 301.

¹⁹ Cowell, *The Jātaka*, Vol. 4, 103.

Even though the two examples above do not appear in same *aṭṭhakathā Jātaka*, the Dharma messages conveyed by the verb about food consumption are beautifully concordant. It can be observed that these examples are in the story about the greedy king who has an insatiable desire for treasure. This action is similar to gluttonous eating; in this case, the action of vomiting connotes the cessation of the desire for treasure; the period after the desire has ceased is the time of ‘full of wisdom’. The meaning is that a man who still has suffering from physical hunger may be full because he does not have mental suffering, again because of non-desire. It is the meaning of ‘to be full’ in Buddhism.

From the analysis of the verbs about consumption used with something other than food in *Jātakatṭhakathā*, it can be seen that the three groups of verbs about consumption are linked systematically in meaning. That is to say, the three groups of verbs about consumption in *Jātakatṭhakathā* are a ‘conceptual system about food consumption’ relating to the implicit food metaphor, which will be discussed next.

The usage of verbs about consumption with things other than food – the implicit food metaphor

A ‘conceptual system about food consumption’ that conveys messages that are linked systematically is the character of ‘metaphor’. The meaning and concept of metaphor will be discussed in order to analyze the ‘conceptual system about food consumption’ completely.

Murray Knowles and Rosamund Moon define metaphor this way: “When we talk about metaphor, we mean the use of language refer to something other than what it was originally applied to, or what it ‘literally’ means, in order to suggest some resemblance or make a connection between the two things.”²⁰

Beyond the meaning of metaphor, the importance of metaphor needs to be mentioned too. The use of metaphor is related to its

²⁰ Knowles, *Introducing Metaphor*, 3.

functions, such as explaining, clarifying, describing or expressing. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson explain the importance of the use of metaphor, especially in culture and religion:

The conceptual systems of cultures and religions are metaphorical in nature. Symbolic metonymies are critical links between everyday experience and the coherent metaphorical systems that characterize religions and cultures. Symbolic metonymies that are grounded in our physical experience provide an essential means of comprehending religious and cultural concepts.²¹

That concept harmonizes well with the appearance of a ‘conceptual system about food consumption’. That is, the group of verbs about food consumption refers to both the action of kāma consumption and the process of Dharma comprehension. It can be concluded that the Dharma message is constructed by the connection of ordinary life experience with the Dharma experience. This diagram illustrates the foregoing:

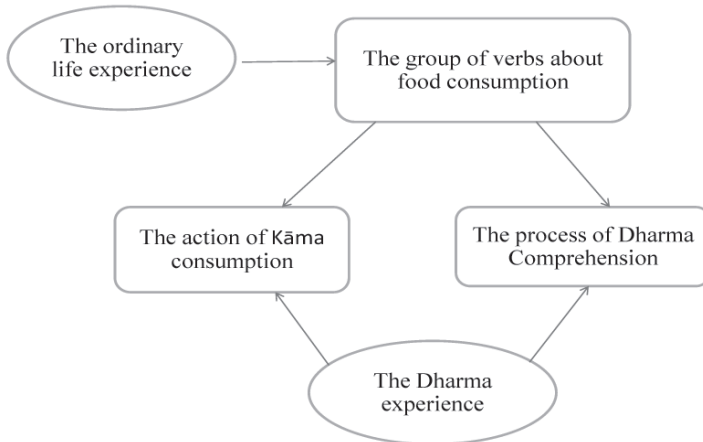


Diagram 1: The connection from the ordinary life experience to the Dharma experience

²¹ Lakoff, *Metaphors We Live By*, 40.

However, the ‘conceptual system about food consumption’ is not a food metaphor but, rather, an ‘implicit food metaphor’. Because it does not directly describe food as *kāma*, but rather demonstrates the verb about food consumption, both the action of *kāma* consumption and the process of Dharma comprehension are implied; thereby, it communicates a binary meaning.

The example of the binary meaning conveyed by an implicit food metaphor is the meaning of the verb ‘to drink’ that connotes ‘to have sexual intercourse with someone’; on the other hand, the motif of drinking the water of life connotes ‘giving someone Dharma’. This binary meaning is constructed by the characteristic of drinking that it is something taken into the body, so it can be associated with every activity in which something is taken into the body. At a deeper level, the significance might be that everyone consumes both *kāma* and Dharma, and man needs to realize that *kāma* is the cause of suffering in order to comprehend that Dharma is the cessation of suffering

The implicit food metaphor and the function of the Jātakaṭṭhakathā

In the previous section, it was mentioned that the ‘conceptual system about food consumption’ is an ‘implicit food metaphor’. This part will discuss the relationship between the implicit food metaphor and the function of the Jātakaṭṭhakathā. Before demonstration of the relationship between those two things, there is need for mention of the function of Jātakaṭṭhakathā.

Because of the status of this Buddhist text, the function of Jātakaṭṭhakathā is the intellectual creation of Dharma hermeneutics to the reader, however the Dharma hermeneutics in Jātakaṭṭhakathā is not only a direct Dharma hermeneutics; there is also an indirect Dharma hermeneutics. The indirect Dharma hermeneutics in Jātakaṭṭhakathā is Dharma hermeneutics by the means of literary techniques that belong to aesthetics. V.I. Braginsky notes that aesthetics is the path to cognition of the Absolute:

...Thus aesthetics, which began from admiring the thing – an act by no means devoid of benefit, as shall see – proved ultimately to be a kind of religious-mystical paths to cognition of the Absolute, while the piece of art of literature appeared as the aesthetic ‘gates’ of Being. At the final point, the highest Beauty and the highest Good, or Benefit, totally merged into one another.²²

The word ‘gates’ above implies the literary techniques, because they are the important means of illustrating the doctrine, moving from the abstract to the concrete object, so that by means of literary techniques, the reader can ‘enter’ to the ‘the highest good’ that can be interpreted by Buddhist perspective, which is ‘Nirvana’ or ‘Nibbāna’. It is known that “the ultimate aim of the Buddha’s teaching is, without question, the attainment of Nibbāna with the realization of the Four Noble Truths.”²³

As a kind of literary technique, metaphor – only the implicit food metaphor in the scope of this paper – is the means to achieve the function of Jātakaṭṭhakathā, which is the creation of an intellectual understanding for the reader. In other words, the reader can comprehend the Four Noble Truths by means of demonstrations conveyed by the implicit food metaphor. Diagram 2 illustrates the coherence between the group of verbs about food consumption that refers to both the action of kāma consumption and the process of the comprehension of Dharma.

²² Braginsky, *The Comparative Study of Traditional Asian Literature*, 30.

²³ Saddhatissa, *Buddhist Ethics Essence of Buddhism*, 165.

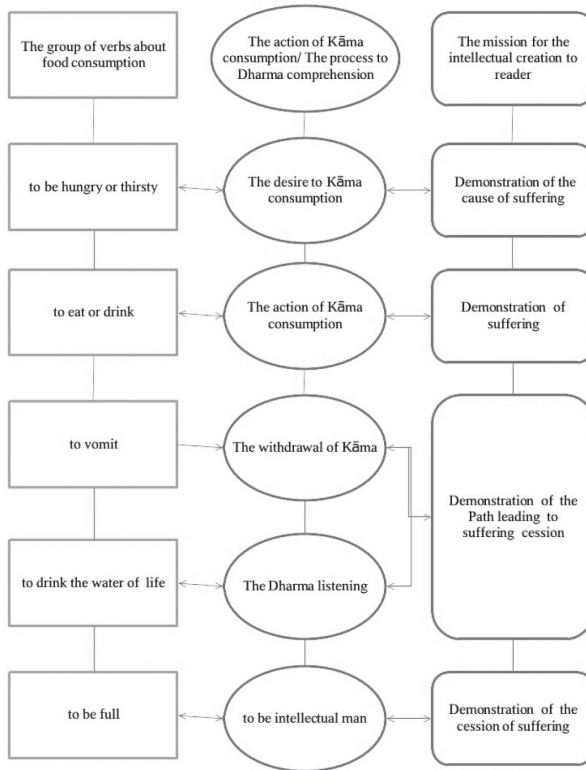


Diagram 2: The coherence between the group of verbs about food consumption , the action of kāma consumption and the process of the comprehension of Dharma, and the function for the creation of intellectual understanding for the reader.

The creation of an intellectual understanding for the reader by demonstration of the Four Noble Truths is the intellectual process brought about by the systematic and sequential interpretation of metaphor. According to the analysis above, the implicit food metaphor is the connection from the everyday life experience of food consumption to the kāma consumption and the process of the comprehension of Dharma. When the reader comprehends the Dharma message by connecting an experience from daily life to the experience described in the Dharma experience, the reader can construct the Dharma message as a demonstration of the Four Noble Truths.

Comprehension of the demonstration of the Four Noble Truths happens in a particular sequence. First kāma is similar to food; therefore, hunger and thirst that illustrate the desire for kāma consumption are the cause of suffering. Second, the eating and drinking that connote kāma consumption are the demonstration of suffering; because these are the dissatisfaction of eating and drinking, they are unsatisfactory. Third, the vomiting of food implies the abandonment of kāma, and the taking of the water of life that suggests listening to the Dharma, are the demonstration of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering. Finally, fullness means the fullness of wisdom, which does not desire kāma consumption anymore; this is the demonstration that insight for the cession of suffering leads to the cessation of suffering. By the intellectual process, an implicit food metaphor accomplishes the function of creating intellectual comprehension in the reader.

Conclusion

The analysis in this paper shows that an implicit food metaphor is the connection from food consumption, an everyday life experience, to kāma consumption and the process of comprehension of the Dharma and Dharma experience. This literary technique conveys the Dharma message that kāma is similar to food, and kāma consumption and the process of comprehension of Dharma are demonstrations of the Four Noble Truths. When readers comprehend the demonstrations of the Four Noble Truths, an implicit food metaphor accomplishes the function of creating that intellectual comprehension in the readers.

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