

# **NARUTO**

Third Edition

**A  
MYTHICAL  
AND  
RELIGIOUS  
ANALYSIS**



*“It’s time to show them that all the myths were real” - Kabuto*

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*Third edition*

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# Author's Note

The aim of this work will be to serve two primary purposes: first, to bring forth the multitude of mythical and religious references that have been incorporated into this manga to light, and second, to illustrate with a side-by-side commentary how significantly they shape the characters, arcs and overall narrative. Ultimately this *cannot* be taken as an authoritative text however, since I own no copyright or bear any involvement into the development of *Naruto* itself, so no matter the number of sources or cross-references I have delineated for the following sections, please take them with at least a single grain of salt.

*Added Note for the third edition:*

With fewer chapters and more organised reference tables, this edition hopes to serve its original purpose, making it an apt manual for curious readers.





# 1

## Land of Waves

The tale of *Naruto* is one of a rambunctious child who, due to the demon he harbours, has been ostracised by his village and lives the fleeting existence of an outcast. Like most Shonen Jump manga, the protagonist is pitted against a rival - the yin to his yang - in the form of Sasuke Uchiha, a child who is supremely gifted and sits at the top of his class in every subject. Contrast this with Naruto, who's failed his graduation exam for the third time as he's yet to perform a perfect clone jutsu.

Mizuki sees a disheartened Naruto walking home, and out of the goodness of his heart tells him a secret that will guarantee his promotion! In actuality, he tricked Naruto into setting off a village-wide search for he has stolen the "sacred manuscript", and if it gets into the wrong hands it could jeopardise the village. The boy is now a threat, which is what he wanted to exacerbate<sup>[1]</sup>. But his malice towards Naruto isn't peculiar to him, as it seems to represent the views of the average villager<sup>[2]</sup>, their hatred always staying hidden until now.

We see the revelation of the decree happen in the forest which has usually been a literary tool to express an environment of disorientation and dissolution of identity, yet here it is seen as a pivotal moment of *clarity*, for the cloud that surrounded Naruto his entire life has been lifted. It all fits, that nobody talks to him and everyone seems to despise him, and since he was born it's been that way. But Iruka doesn't want Naruto to live in all that despair and hopes he can find it in his heart to forgive people like him, and martyrs himself to protect the boy: "If I'd been a better teacher... a better self, maybe neither of us would have come to this"<sup>[3]</sup>. A better self is a

unique turn of phrase and is the literalised translation, as this speaks to his mistake in seeing Naruto partly as a beast and didn't consider what effect the decree would have on his "self". He knew that he wasn't the fox, and its evil being sealed away was something he happened to be born into; however, he prioritised his role as a teacher and as a Shinobi, which is why I'm not surprised that Naruto ran away from Iruka for being a co-conspirator for so long. He chose to keep the secret away from him because he was assured it was in the village's best interest and opted for the collective over the individual, despite being the only person who could lend a hand.

But this sacrifice signifies Iruka's shift to realising that the individual isn't helped *at the expense* of the societal code, instead it is reified when the togetherness of people exists on a one-to-one level. The Othering which had been pernicious until now had Naruto excluded from the usual modes of conversation that alleviates conflict, boxing him in as the image of a monster. Interestingly, Mizuki has a perverse liking for this representation and hopes that he too is perceived in the same way - "Naruto and I are two of a kind. I can use that scroll to achieve the same kind of limitless power!"<sup>[4]</sup>. He wants to be feared and despised as he could attain the strength to preside over an entire village, which fills his malevolent fantasies with glee. It is around this point that the Anime Profile for him states "Mizuki's dark ambition bares its fangs"<sup>[5]</sup>, as he tries to wear the cunning and imposing symbology of the fox itself, though to no avail, because he doesn't have its *bite*...

By using the logic he applied to himself, he is almost horrified that Naruto exists for he "understands" that he must be manipulating others too as they are "the same". Both Iruka and Mizuki make the claim they are mirror images of Naruto, but using two different frameworks: Iruka is trying to connect to his heart, this unfathomable collective which cannot be singled

out, whereas Mizuki tries to reason with a single aspect, the blade, that Naruto can impress onto the world. I say heart(心) and blade(刃) as these are the two aspects of the Kanji for Ninja(忍), with the literal meaning of "heart under blade". It is these two opposing forces which when balanced create a noble warrior. Whilst making the claim they were equals, Mizuki launched a shuriken at Naruto with the intent to kill. Does this mean he would apply such violence to himself? Of course not, for he has distinguished himself as master of evil, wit and charm - everyone else are mere pawns. Consequently he will never "peer behind the curtain" so to speak into the character of another person, and till the day he dies he won't see anybody else as really Real - a phenomena that's walled off when one doesn't sacrifice themselves.

Now it's all well and good that I can pick apart Mizuki, but how does Naruto know for certain that Iruka isn't just like everyone else, a master manipulator perhaps? He listens in on the two of them arguing about who and what he is whilst tucked behind a tree, which Kishimoto uses as a motif to symbolise genuine insights into another person's character. He tears up when Iruka calls him "a citizen of Konohagakure, Naruto Uzumaki"<sup>[6]</sup>. He is dissuaded of any doubts that he doesn't belong, as he's not only been acknowledged as an individual, but welcomed into the village with open arms just by being *himself*. This moment is when he sees Iruka's sentiment to be true and jumps in to save him.

## Bell training

Sasuke watches Naruto fall into each and every trap and this soothes his ego as he could never have fallen for such basic trickery. Naruto acts without any virtue at all, with little respect for his reputation or pride as there really isn't any: no Uchiha heritage, no discernible destiny he must fulfil; whereas Sasuke cannot afford to look like an idiot for he is the noble knight who

shall slay Itachi Uchiha, restore the clan and rewrite history. Kakashi acknowledges he's different, seeing the arrogance in him that he used to have too.

During the training exercise we see Sakura starting to think this task is unreachable (literally): "Even if we couldn't' manage it this time, I'm sure next time if we give it our all..."<sup>[7]</sup>. Come back next year? This rustles the spirit of the avenger in Sasuke, for he never feels he has enough time - to come back next year is out of the question. His purpose is threatened, and he falls back to why he is here in the first place: "Only I can kill him. He made me cry... My only goal is to have my revenge. I have to become stronger than he is... Now"<sup>[8]</sup>. With that odd, fragmented affirmation he continues, while Sakura thinks he must mean the Sensei.

After many more failed attempts, Kakashi grills each of them for being too individualistic and not working cohesively as a squad. He squashes Sasuke like a bug, trying to convey to him the importance of keeping the team intact, as it is their combined abilities and group strategy which gets the work done. Whilst it is certainly the brilliance of a few individuals in key moments, consistent progress is made together, thus fostering more chances for individuals to shine<sup>[9]</sup>. Sasuke huffs in a lowered, accepting tone that this does have some importance and he combines this idea with the necessary progress of destroying his brother. "We'll all need our strength if we're going to work together to get those bells. You're no good to me if you're just going to be a liability"<sup>[10]</sup>. He convinces the other team members to fully accept companionship - though only he comprehends it, admittedly through a rather morbid lens. Sasuke will do whatever it takes, including being there for Naruto.

Kakashi said "A true Shinobi seeks for the hidden meanings within hidden meanings"<sup>[11]</sup> so let's recap on this exercise to try and find those out. The

recurring theme that he set for each of Squad 7 were traps and illusions that he wanted them to sniff out and subvert, but they fell into all of them. Naruto just assumed Kakashi dropped one of the bells out in the open and went to grab it, setting off the rope trap and getting tied up. So, there was an initial hidden meaning behind the innocuous placement of the bell, but then what is the hidden meaning behind that? To isolate him. To prevent him from helping his teammates, thereby nullifying potential teamwork and there goes the only chance at succeeding. To immobilise Sasuke in the ground prevents him assisting, and putting Sakura under genjutsu was the quickest way to render her immobile. He showed off all three types of jutsu, whilst also illustrating their biggest weakness.

In addition to this, Kakashi made them more impulsive by not letting them have breakfast. By making them hungrier, it's more likely they'll prioritise the food and delay helping their comrade. A good Shinobi may be able to evade the traps that Kakashi set, which is useful when going out on missions, but would they have understood the intention of those traps? We can accept plenty of skillful Shinobi who care about themselves and have no interest in working collaboratively, but that would ruin many missions and eventually the village itself. This is the reasoning behind his central philosophy: "Those who violate the rules and fail to follow orders are lower than garbage. However, those who do not care for and support their comrades are even lower than that!"<sup>[12]</sup>.

## The Warrior Code

The previous two volumes whereby we were introduced to the 'Honourable Grandson' Konohamaru and subsequent Bell Exercise have laid the groundwork for how Kishimoto wants to define his version of Shinobi, with their own unique philosophy, values and system.

*Naruto* is a world that borrows heavily from the Edo time period(1603-1867), which is after the Warring States of many diffuse clans. Here Ninja go from being in the thick of war to subsidiary agents for the Shogunate and their respective Feudal Lords, with work centring on espionage, assassination and so forth. Likewise, the once central role of the Samurai in keeping law and order within communities dissipated, and their unrivalled status came into question. With a number of sweeping reforms, economically powerful commoners could purchase Samurai privileges, like the right to wear swords<sup>[13]</sup> which muddled the distinction between classes.

Thus began the task of theorists like Yamaga Sokō(1622–1685) to find a path forward for the Samurai, using Confucianism to answer this quandary. Essentially he theorised that the Samurai, due to the money they received in stipends, had more time to focus on ethical behaviour than the average person who is mired in daily labour, and could therefore serve as the moral bastions of society - directly in the image of the Chinese Confucian gentleman<sup>[14]</sup>.

This is why Ebisu takes himself to be the perfect person to get Konohamaru to the Hokage position, since neither of them have to concern themselves with everyday matters, allowing more time to learn about leadership. We know that he uses Confucianism as well based on his perfect recital of their primary virtues: “the revered Lord Hokage knows and understands the eight principles that are the cornerstone of all knowledge of the Shinobi: virtue, justice, ceremony, wisdom, loyalty, faithfulness, prudence and filial piety”<sup>[15]</sup>; however, as Kishimoto illustrates, he has become ignorant of the primal urges not transcendent of them and gets completely incapacitated by the wiley Fox’s harem jutsu<sub>1</sub>.

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<sup>1</sup> This proclivity for *Naruto* to shapeshift into a woman is taken from the folklore of Tamamo-no Mae, a folktale about a nine-tailed fox who tricked Emperor Toba into being his concubine, but was eventually found out<sup>[16]</sup>

Given a few years of multi-faceted research and academic writing, the umbrella term for which all of the Samurai ethical codes of honour and chivalry came to be assorted under would be *Bushido*, which translates to “The Way of the Warrior”. Not so much an ancient term, as its first instance can be found in the *Kōyō gunkan*<sup>[17]</sup>, which is a 17th century manuscript detailing the exploits of war of the Takeda family. Prior to its use we saw more specific *bushi* activities, using terms such as *kyūba no michi* (the way of horseback archery) and *yumiya toru mi no narai* (customs for those who draw the bow). The reason that Bushido was more fragmented reflected the state of the times, and the leading theory as to why there wasn’t a “Grand Unified Bushido” was because Samurai were too busy with war and practical matters to do it<sup>[18]</sup>, but each clan had their own set of maxims<sup>[19]</sup> which became assimilated to form a broader social order.

But Bushido would come to evolve almost as quickly as it could be defined, as the coming of the Meiji Period(1868-1912) saw a radical reinterpretation, with values of obligation to one’s sovereign taking precedence. The reason being is that heads of state began to worry about the looming threat of Western Expansionism, and needed a citizenry that would ostracise the foreigner whilst heightening the image of the Emperor. Just a book came to be pulled from the annals of history, *Hagakure*, with its message aligning perfectly with said requirements. You may have noticed that the Japanese name for the Leaf is *Kono-hagakure*, which is a play on words for representing their home as the quintessence of the warrior. This has and will become one of the primary virtues of a Shinobi depicted in the Land of Waves arc, which illustrates the relatively modern strain of Bushido that Kishimoto has elected to describe his characters.

What followed historically is a partial integration of Western values as Japanese people began to change their diet, behaviour and clothing - an

uptake that was fastest amongst the upper classes<sup>[20]</sup>; however the pearl of individualism was met with scepticism and unease, and a prioritisation of nationalistic-confucian values began to mount as primary<sup>[21]</sup>. *Naruto* as the blonde, blue-eyed Ninja is meant to evoke this very same symbiosis, and his message of radical individualism comes across as equally weird.

There was somebody though that shared many of *Naruto*'s core beliefs, and that man's name was Fukuzawa Yukichi(1835-1901). Contrary to many of his contemporaries, he saw the xenophobia of the Imperial Loyalists as bad for development because it would mean the rejection of bonds with other lands; it would hinder the ability to incorporate Western technology and science, of which he believed it would benefit society. Fukuzawa's Bushido went against the grain of unconditional loyalty to the Emperor, not just articulating an individual's sense of freedom<sup>[22]</sup>, but even egalitarianism to the point of abolishing the class system.

Whilst this resembles much of what *Naruto* advocates for, let's not forget he is still a ninja. Moreover, there's no formal explanation of "Bushido" in *Naruto* as the closest we get are mentions of "Nindō", or Ninja Way. Now we have to understand whether this is a repackaging of the Samurai tradition or whether the Ninja have their own sort of ethical structure. To answer the latter, we can peer at some historical records.

Unlike their brothers in arms, the ninja have never been tied to the Bureaucratic and Aristocratic structures of society, with the majority of them coming from the working classes<sup>[23]</sup> and living separate lives from the Samurai both socially and consequently ethically. The average person felt their contempt at being a lesser citizen, so their disdain for all things chivalric was described as 'legendary'<sup>[24]</sup>; their refusal to abide by the same code wasn't just a militaristic move, but something that carried over from their normal lives.



There was definitely no “creed” or “agreement” that Ninja had between each other or anyone on the battlefield: whatever Ninjutsu (techniques used by *Nin*) worked, would be implemented. There was no attempt to square up to their opponents and declare a duel, and if any chance could be taken to get them without a fair challenge, the better<sup>[25]</sup>.

As you can imagine, the Japanese government didn’t want to highlight the role that Ninja played during the Sengoku period and tried to restrict knowledge of them in favour of the gentlemanly, upright Samurai. Take for example the *Ehon Toyotomi Kunki*, which was about the life of the Daimyo Hideyoshi, where only *a single page* covers the ninja<sup>[26]</sup>. During the austerity measures around the late Edo period, productions of prints were limited to works designed to improve morality and reduce extravagance and thus there was no media on things like ninja assassinations until the Meiji period<sup>[27]</sup>.

This image was hidden from Naruto too, as when he left the village to go on his first mission, he still had the ideals of himself vanquishing enemies with nothing but sheer brilliance; but what he learned is that there are no rules beyond Konoha’s borders. His first adversaries typified this as they were the demon brothers Gōzu and Meizu<sup>[28]</sup>, taken from the two characters with the same name that guard the underworld in Shinto Mythology. They specifically stand at the rear gates to stop souls from escaping once they’ve gone down into Hell, in this case to stop Naruto going back home.

As it stands, Naruto doesn’t coincide with the combative arts of the ninja beyond just street smarts, as he wants to use the Way of the Shinobi to get respected, and all the jutsu he performs reflects his playful childishness; he doesn’t really want to kill or be killed as that is still too far away, but now he has seen how intense a mission is up close. Naruto will need to admire the

art form and immerse himself but he needs a *reason* to do so. The Land of Waves arc establishes this motivation and makes a Ninja out of him in the end. When he's at the grave of Zabuza and Haku he realises the pain in the life of a Ninja, and is adamant that he will forge his own *dō*, but there is no mention of any ethics attached to it<sup>[29]</sup> in true Ninja fashion - only the anime slides in the added caveats of it being "good and true". Primarily it is a Way out of this dark fate and what is good will be what his individuality interacts with - for now.

Just as Naruto is both a Samurai and a Ninja, and neither at the same time, *Naruto* as a universe isn't firmly set in either the Edo or Meiji periods, but relies on key elements of both to construct its narrative. The Edo is the time of the military dictatorship and the transition of Samurai and Ninja out of the times of war, which is where our characters are at the moment; but in terms of values and major themes, the latter is the one that has the Japanese citizen struggling between the worth of the individual, and the individual's relation to society and God<sup>[30]</sup>.

## The Land of Waves

On the boat towards home, Tazuna reveals the true difficulties of the mission and the destitution they are about to see. His land was once a proud and noble people, who have been reduced to homeless desperates dependent on drugs that Gato has imported<sup>[31]</sup>. The international billionaire businessman has destroyed local forms of government, accruing too much wealth and power making him unaccountable and thus free to exploit the poorest members of the populace. If only these plotlines had some real world relevance!

In the anime they mentioned "he casts a long and deadly shadow"<sup>[32]</sup> and in previous episodes we learnt that Kage means "shadow" which may imply

here that the monstrously rich and powerful can balloon into governments of their own. Back in the time of Edo, Lords(Daimyo) would often hire mercenaries to do the dirty work of espionage and assassination, as they didn't want to have their Samurai's reputation soiled by engaging in such things. This is where we would see the birth of the dark-cloaked and elusive symbol of the ninja take root<sup>[33]</sup>.

Ninja almost exclusively comprised the role of mercenary work, and as we see in the next arc, Zabuza was hired to do Gato's bidding for pay. Kishimoto plainly illustrates that businessmen have become the new lords of our time, but without departing from many of the ways of old. Interestingly, when power was consolidated under a single Shogun it was still allowed for Daimyo to have Shinobi as an army if their income was at 10,000 Koku or above<sup>[34]</sup>. Zabuza's presence shows the collapse of the ideal of the Shinobi as a self-righteous individual who does what needs to be done, to being someone who can sit in the shadows for pennies to kill people who're declared obstacles.

It's thanks to these thugs that Gato's business has swelled, keeping the people in perpetual fear of punishment so they don't leave their jobs, protest or react to the widespread destruction: control of the masses has been achieved. It takes someone like Kaiza - who is Inari's stepfather - to fight on despite all this and stare death in the face. The scars on his body are testament to his philosophy.

We learn that Tazuna is the man who will construct the one and only thing that will release his otherwise iron grip, which is the bridge to allow trade with nations outside of marine transport<sup>[35]</sup>. This will allow smaller, independent businesses to trade without having to go through his shipping network which always had the last say on all things that left the land. The

demand for his shipping networks will plummet and people will have a degree of autonomy - we can't have that!

They get off the boat and make their way to Tazuna's residence where Kakashi, again, is the only one able to detect the subtle trap Zabuza laid out. A white-hare isn't supposed to have that colour pelt, meaning it has been kept indoors - now it's being used as a decoy to see whether they fall for it. Zabuza swings down and stands on the handle of his sword, blade jutting into the trunk of a tree. Naruto wants to prove himself and is about to run straight in, but this guy is in a completely different league. It's time to unveil the eye which can "penetrate and see the reality behind any illusion or spell"<sup>[36]</sup> - the Sharingan.

The "Mirror Wheel Eye" is a form of Dojutsu (ocular ninjutsu) which is capable of seeing chakra (though not as clearly as the Byakugan, nor over long distances either), but due to its acuteness someone like Kakashi can deduce the secrets of a technique quickly and even replicate it himself. This greater level of detail is what makes the Sharingan capable of seeing things like genjutsu and reflecting them back at the caster, which Itachi is famous for.

This could be a real nuisance, and Zabuza has just the antidote - the Hidden Mist Jutsu. A technique which layers the battlefield in thick fog which makes seeing anything beyond an arm's stretch impossible. A couple chapters ago, at the start of the Bell exercise, Kakashi said: "The basis of all Shinobi arts is to become invisible... eradicate yourself"<sup>[37]</sup>, meaning that you must get rid of your scent, your footsteps, anything which would identify you. Such skill in the fundamentals will translate to mastery of Shinobi arts, and he has become the master of silent killing; combine this with the Sharingan which represents the ability to parse through illusions and we have our first symbolic battle.

Zabuza lets the suspense build and build, driving them all insane. Even our cool-headed Sasuke is sweating knowing that any small movement will give away his position and he'll die, it's almost too much to bear. Zabuza swoops down right in the centre of their manji formation and Kakashi just about gets the clone, "tricking" Zabuza with a clone of his own. But this Zabuza is also a water clone<sup>[38]</sup>! He kicks Kakashi into the river and traps him inside a water prison. He's played this perfectly, and now his clone is going to clear up the rest of them; however, if they just run then the clone cannot follow them past a fixed distance<sup>[39]</sup>, the bridge builder will be safe.

Naruto thinks that's pretty sound advice and is ready to go, but in stumbling back he feels the pain of his left hand. The promise he made, "to never run away again" is irrevocably tied to his journey as a Ninja, and he runs toward Zabuza to grab his fallen headband. He stands out in front and exemplifies the hard-nosed *sakigake* of the Samurai, which is an ideal that basically demands a warrior to stand without fear, to not merely be present but *eager* to engage the enemy<sup>[40]</sup>.

Zabuza chuckles... these runts think they're tough? Back when he was their age he had already dyed his hands in enemy blood. The graduation exam in the Hidden Mist wasn't so concerned with teamwork as the Leaf, in fact it was the opposite: the very comrades who you shared your dreams with, you had to kill - or be killed in the frenzy<sup>[41]</sup>. In fact, this barbaric practice that was designed to instil fearlessness and killer-instinct had to be reigned in because of one specific student. A fiend, who hadn't even graduated, butchered over a hundred members of that year's graduating class, terrifying even the proctors that instantiated the rule. That child was Zabuza Momochi.

No knowledge of teamwork, no knowledge of comradery, just a fight to the death and the line between killing in the name of Shinobi and ceaseless murder was lost in this blood. Shinobi look upon this in fear that it may be the way to find and foster the strongest Ninja capable of completing missions without wavering. This is the ideal which people like Danzo took and directly incorporated into his own model called the Foundation (or the Root in the original manga). More on that in subsequent chapters.

This battle between him and Kakashi seems to be an adaptation of a legendary duel between two famous Japanese swordsmen, namely Miyamoto Musashi and Sasaki Kojiro. The latter was famous for fighting with an oversized *nodachi*, a type of long sword colloquially called a "laundry-drying pole" but here we see Zabuza's sword spans around a foot wide as well, hyperbolised to make him more intimidating. Kojirō was also given the nickname "The Demon of the Western Provinces"<sup>[42]</sup>, to which Zabuza was coincidentally named "The Demon of the Hidden Mist".

Kojirō would come to fight his toughest duel against Musashi who was undefeated - and would die never losing a single duel either. Whilst I don't think Kakashi resembles much of Musashi outside of having the "lightning blade" technique (and thus it loosely being a duel of swordsmen), he repeatedly taunted Zabuza - something Musashi does in his own duels. In his fight against Kojiro he annoyed him by turning up hours late for their duel, which is actually a trait Kakashi has when meeting Team 7.

Musashi would go on to write one of the most famous books in Japanese martial arts and strategy, *The Book of Five Rings*, which I theorise had a few of its teachings spill over into this match. For example, whenever your opponent plans to strike, you have to grasp the first few letters - "stri" - and be there first, stopping him from completing his striking movement<sup>[43]</sup>. It requires a predictive prowess which Kakashi was able to induce when he

fooled Zabuza into thinking he was a psychic, completing his sentences and performing the jutsu he was about to use. Likewise, at the start of the fight Zabuza had already been infusing his chakra into the lake before making his first move, which is how he set up the water prison whilst Kakashi was thinking of a ground based assault. This ties into another tidbit of Musashi's philosophy in regards to thinking about the sea whenever your opponent has their mind set on the mountain<sup>[44]</sup>. And lastly, Zabuza's art of silent killing requires him to reign in his desire to rampage and butcher, for he has to strike exactly at the point his opponent does not expect it<sup>[45]</sup>.

But just as the tables have turned and the demon is about to be slain, we are introduced to the mysterious boy in the mask who flies down gracefully from the trees and kills him with two perfectly placed needles to the neck. We later learn this is Haku, currently the greatest child prodigy in the series. Naruto is incandescent with rage as he can see this kid is no bigger than him, yet took him down "like it was nothing! What, do we suck or something? What's up with that?!"<sup>[46]</sup>. It cuts to Sasuke scowling as he also compares himself, probably imagining how much he could've progressed if he had such ability too. Ironically, Haku has merely cast this illusion of brilliance, mastering the art of theatre: the swiftness of the kill, the mystery of the mask and the believable story of being a tracker all go hand in hand to compliment each other - illuminating the stage, inciting trust and integrity. He is no more than a lucid caricature, these abilities springing up from his own lack of identity - making it easier to swim from one character to the next.

At Tazuna's home Team 7 realise that Haku wasn't in fact part of the Mist tracking squad and there'll most likely be another run-in with the Demon. Naruto is elated at the opportunity for a second chance, though this sparks an embittered Inari to speak up: "Hero'? You're dumb! There's no such

thing"<sup>[47]</sup>. Obviously if Naruto had believed such a thing he wouldn't have gotten to where he is now, rightfully rejecting such pessimism.

The name of this little man is taken from the Shinto God of Agriculture, often drawn and affiliated with rice due to its prevalence in Japanese history - the name itself means "carrying rice"<sup>[48]</sup>. The relationship with Inari therefore correlates to the wealth of the harvest, the fertility of the lands and consequently the state of hunger, or lack thereof. The boy then is representative of the poverty-stricken Land of Waves, as Inari himself is lost, devoid of hope and weak.

But funnily enough, the shrines of the Agricultural God often feature a protector, an overseer of the rice fields, which usually takes the form of stone statues of foxes<sup>[49]</sup>. Across the thousands of temples of Inari that populate Japan, the kitsune serve as guides and messengers to the people that come to pay respect. One of the reasons being is that the fox symbol became a metaphor for individuality due to its shapeshifting abilities, and people would imagine that they too could change their circumstances despite restricted social mobility<sup>[50]</sup>.

The symbol of the fox in Naruto is probably undergirding the nindo he shall declare later - to walk his own path and find the answer himself. Indeed, if Inari can come to this realisation too, then collectively the villagers will start to break free from Gato's iron clutches; Inari (the Shinto God) is *meant* to symbolise change in the face of continuity in the first place<sup>[51]</sup>, and so the first presumption that needs to topple is that there are no heroes...

This is also why Inari temples, whilst all under the same name, have a range of other agricultural deities incorporated, with slightly different practices for people to show reverence<sup>[52]</sup>; it is another way of saying that what



composes the individual is a vast pantheon of expression indebted to all kinds of things, as that milieu clarifies who and what they are. This is exactly the kind of unusual hero Naruto wants to be: one that never forgets the tireless work and sacrifice of his friends in tandem with his own accomplishments.

The history of Inari started with her being associated with rice, crop fertility and the protection of fields in general<sup>[53]</sup>, which continued in its pure form until roughly the late Heian period(late 10th century)<sup>[54]</sup>. This is when we can say kitsune started to get incorporated, but it may be even earlier<sup>[55]</sup>. The final iteration came around the sixteenth century, as the God had become the protector of warriors<sup>[56]</sup>, but this image would wane with the drop in warfare that was existing at the time. If the historical side-by-side isn't leaping out at you already, this mirrors the timeline of the Inari that *we* see: he went from connections just to the agricultural land, to his meeting with Naruto and forming a connection with him, to being on the frontlines of battle against Gato's goons in the end.

We see this first transition when he goes from scolding Naruto to watching him in the woods doing his tree-climbing training<sup>[57]</sup>. It's because he finally sees another person embody some courage and grit, qualities which Tazuna mentions his people had lost: "Our people - and especially little Inari were robbed of the very meaning of courage"<sup>[58]</sup>. With all the mythological journeying we've done we can see the double-meaning of Inari, as child and agricultural god: the symbiosis of people and spirit is broken.

Later in the story, we see that Inari watched the murder of his father, publicly, as it was Gato's way of discouraging any other resistors to the regime. In the manga he actually gets crucified "to ensure that such an awful thing will never disturb any of us ever again"<sup>[59]</sup> and is textbook "dictator for the people". Such brutal sights stamped on him the way of the world:

the strong would play with its prey and humiliate the weak, change was a fantasy and heroes were idiots who purposefully stuck their necks under the guillotine. That's how reality was written, for the boy who now only saw and felt pain. I'm sure seeing Naruto reminded him of his father, and his outbursts were merely etched into him by his past - he thought he foresaw history about to repeat itself.

The overarching theme, from Iruka, to Kakashi, to Kaiza to Haku, shows that no matter what, you have to protect that which you hold precious, otherwise it shall be taken. The story of Kaiza holding the Land of Waves precious to him, meant he would do anything no matter the tiny chances of defeating someone like Gato. He had to try, and he knew that he may fail, but what was equally important is not letting the next generation be born without a flame in their bellies. Kakashi holds his comrades as truly precious, he didn't consider his own life when taken in by the Water Prison, he wanted them to escape if they had the chance. Haku holds Zabuza as that which is most precious to him, sacrificing his life without a flicker of hesitation; however, deep in the depths of all this passion is an issue: we may create future enemies by drawing the line so firmly on what we protect and what we don't. But it seems we must, so is it also inevitable that conflict will always exist? How will we achieve peace and understanding? This void is embodied in Haku even after he has found something to protect and he forces Zabuza to become the friend, the father-figure and community. By doing this he doesn't have to worry about any possible conflicts that would arise with anyone else.

Additionally, affirming our need to protect puts an incredible amount of pressure on individuals to act and imposes an ultimatum on them, most notably when Inari could only watch in fear as his mother was taken by Gato's bandits<sup>[60]</sup>. He is just a child who cannot compete with armed swordsmen, and this well-entrenched desire to protect is obliterated in

front of him, doing much unnecessary psychological damage as he is forced to admit his own inadequacy. He shouldn't put all the pressure on himself to do so, and life shows us time and again there are people who we may consider strangers but consider us family, helping to protect his mother as if she were their own. Naruto stuck his neck out to save her, which was able to relight the belief within Inari's heart to trust in others, to fight once more for what his father believed in. He soon raced around trying to rally support in the village - the flame slowly spreading from house to house.

This goes back to what I was saying earlier that lines of trust are too sharp, but the method of establishing a “social membrane” of what to let in versus keep out is still unclear. Inari is about eight years old here, and is still much in the phase of imitating others and finding himself through constant interaction with the outside world. But not everything will resonate as profoundly as Kaiza's message or Naruto's actions. Why? Because they speak to his *spirit* and regardless of how he chooses to grow up and apply himself, he shall do it with the passion that they've shown.

Naruto beats up the goons and commends Inari for being brave, and takes a moment to apologise for calling him a baby. “You're a big strong boy”<sup>[61]</sup> is the encouragement he wanted to hear and he begins to tear up. Fearing he may get made fun of again, Naruto reassures him - “Nothing wrong with crying when you're happy!”<sup>[62]</sup> as he remembers how he cried when Iruka called him “Naruto Uzumaki of the Leaf”<sup>[63]</sup>. He knows the strength that abounds from being accepted as yourself, but it's even more than that. The praise isn't *literally* true, he isn't big nor strong but it's a potential which he wants to leap into - it's part of the fuel that keeps those flames alive and if tempered carefully, will see him grow into a fine young man.

But not everybody is as fortunate as Inari to have these kinds of role models, as we look at Haku when he was a child when he faced a similar

ultimatum - but here his mother was killed and he was next. Only by succumbing entirely to the powers which lay dormant was he able to overcome certain death. But what he finds after that is sparse, soul-destroying nothingness. Nagato is another character we see, this time in Shippuden, who was just a child when he could only watch in horror at his parents being murdered in front of him, trying their best to offer him time to escape. Again, only by losing himself completely and relying on his untrained Rinnegan did he survive. The difference between Nagato and Haku were the mentors they had: Yahiko seeking peace and cooperation, Zabuza seeking vengeance, destruction and takeover.

The fact that Haku was attacked by this tribalistic domination and *won* however meant the concept of overwhelming power was inscribed into him, more specifically the utilisation of his Kekkei Genki and the ability to act without the help of others. Zabuza concretised this idea by exemplifying the dominator image further and pretty much negated any chance of Haku returning to the notions of community or knowing the strength that comes through cooperation. He wanted him to act as the unconscious warrior once again, only this time to be the demon under his control.

Naruto catches up to the rest of Team 7 at the bridge, where he has to fight the masked man from before. A particularly vexing jutsu, an Ice-Style technique, made by combining Water and Wind-Style chakra - hence it is something Kakashi cannot copy. How the Ice-Mirror technique works is that he pours himself into one, and that image is reflected onto all other mirrors, so any attack he throws becomes very difficult to identify at its source. It's even harder to see when there are hundreds of needles flying from everywhere, as he combines this with the teleportation technique<sup>[64]</sup>.

Whilst it may not be immediately obvious, this jutsu is psychologically very apt at expressing Haku's identity as someone who relies on images rather

than physical form as he took up the costume of the assailant, the boy gathering herbs and in the end the martyr. Intuitively it looks like a dimensionality reduction from his complex three-dimensional self, to a simplified two-dimensional representation used solely for the purpose of fighting.

Haku has accepted that role as a tool and made his dream the same as Zabuza's, helping in any way he could to accomplish it. He made the dream "his own" but gave up on himself first, as he says: "I shall kill my own heart with my blade - just as the word 'Shinobi' was originally the words 'heart' and 'blade' - and act as a full-fledged Shinobi would"<sup>[65]</sup>. It's sad that he has to pierce his own heart to have the ice in his veins to take another person's life. That the Hidden Mist cultivates this mentality makes their Shinobi strong enough to do what's necessary - making the battlefield an abattoir for unconfident ninja. As the demon says, "you don't live with death or grow up needing to kill to ensure your own survival. In you those skills - and the mindset they require - die stillborn!"<sup>[66]</sup>.

Since the day Zabuza found Haku in the middle of nowhere, with nothing at all and barely able to survive in the cold, he took him in and instilled these fighting instincts into him. But no matter how hard or how long he kept trying to turn him into a machine, it was only because Haku wanted to repay Zabuza for adopting him that he could kill others. But his nature struggled against this image even when trying to be for his master. Haku wasn't a machine, and remains human.

Sasuke is straining his eyes trying to keep track of him and he is still able to move out of the way of fatal Senbon shots, slowly getting better - and he's starting to see through the illusion, dodging an almost impossible shot. The only way he could do that is by predicting Haku's movements... and lo and behold, the Sharingan has awakened<sup>[67]</sup>! But he may not live to see them

come into bloom, as can hardly move now with all the needles that've bombarded his neck, arms and legs. Naruto thought he blocked them, but his comrade has a real chance of dying in front of him. Why would he do such a thing? Sasuke has no idea why he moved, he just did<sup>[68]</sup>, but Haku knows the reason: "in order to protect someone he cared about, he threw himself headlong into what he knew full well was a trap"<sup>[69]</sup>. This seems to be one of the things that come with making something precious enough that you protect it, as his commitment probably stemmed from the fact he had already lost so much - he couldn't take losing his teammates.

Naruto's rage bubbles to the surface and he screams that he will never forgive him for this<sup>[70]</sup>. Kakashi was worried that the pair of them would lose because they don't have the same killer instinct as Mist Shinobi, but even Haku cannot believe the bloodthirsty shift manifesting before him. He shatters all his mirrors with just the physicalisation of his chakra and delivers one heavy punch to the face, splitting the mask.

Despite his eyes red with blood lust, he can't kill this person now he knows it was the kid from before, as he thought they could've been friends. Haku is disgusted by this "mercy" and claims it isn't kind nor right to leave him alive as he killed his beloved friend<sup>[71]</sup>. In fact, we know he *didn't*, but since he failed he wanted to use that to spur Naruto to hate.

Haku says nonchalantly that "Master Zabuza has no use for a weak Shinobi. You've taken away my reason for living"<sup>[72]</sup> and wants to be killed for he no longer has a purpose. He considers himself to be a disgraced Shinobi and qualifies as a *Rōnin* - a wandering Ninja. Ro(浪) also has the meaning of "waves" and in this context refers to a ninja that has gone "adrift" from their obligations, and you don't have to stretch the definition far to see the application toward the villagers of the Land of Waves either.

This Samurai terminology has also been adapted into the workplace, as it can refer to someone that has been made jobless, and so the symbology of obligation to their Lord has been carried over to his or her employer. Fortunately there isn't an analogue to this ritualistic self-sacrifice yet, which can be demanded the moment one falls short of their duty. In the time of Edo, it wasn't uncommon for a Samurai to perform this act as it was supposedly better to cut open your stomach than live in depression, according to a cheerful excerpt from *Hagakure*<sup>[73]</sup>. Due to this defeat Haku welcomes death, but obviously this implies throughout his whole life he would have to go undefeated.

Naruto hears of his past and how he felt totally unwanted, unloved and shunned from the world - but this is precisely why it hurts him to see someone resolve themselves to an object! But even a cursory look at his past illustrates why he can do this to himself, as Haku thought his father loved him but then he found out about his "barbaric" blood and decided to kill him<sup>[74]</sup>. His father's love was conditional and so that's been carried over into how he forms a bond with Zabuza. In meeting someone who loved the parts of himself everyone had hated, he presumed he must've loved the *totality of his person*, but this doesn't have to be the case, in fact it looks like just the other side of the coin.

Just as Naruto finds it within himself to attack for the last time, Haku stops him - as he has sensed he may still have a shred of use left after all.

His body lays cold, motionless on the bridge just as Gato and his bumbling idiots come sauntering up - with the boss taking great pleasure in kicking the dead child who nearly broke his arm. Zabuza and Kakashi are able to stomach this heinously immoral, truly evil act without flickering probably due to the countless missions that had some of the same gut-wrenching infliction. What's interesting is that the manga showed Gato kicking his

face with enough force that blood flew out, but in the anime this is cut and we don't see anything which is an allusion to our own impressionability, our own unwillingness to stomach such things too.

Deep down this wasn't the loss of a mere tool, as Zabuza's attacks have now become sloppy, maniacal and inaccurate, with Kakashi slapping him away easily. No longer can his mind be devoid of thoughts or impulses<sup>[75]</sup>, as whether he likes it or not emotions are bubbling up to the surface.

Now that he's no longer in Gato's employ he has no need to fight, and he and Kakashi agree to stop. I imagine they just shrug shoulders and head home, it's just business, and Gato says he employs people like him as nobody cares what happens to renegades, it's just economical<sup>[76]</sup>. All of them seem to be skirting around the humanity of it all, but Naruto doesn't buy it and keeps shouting at Zabuza to recognise what Haku meant to him. He made the ultimate sacrifice and asked for nothing, he threw away the chance to have a dream of his own and never wavered once. Can Zabuza still stand here and say that he liked Haku just because of his gifts?

The armour finally cracks and he begins to shed tears. He opens up about just how much he cherished the boy in all his quirks, and recognises the love he received. It is at this point he truly despairs. He admits that Shinobi can say and do what they will, but in the end they are still human and may not be able to escape that fact<sup>[77]</sup>. Shinobi are trying to cut through their own heart with a blade, as Haku said, but the only way he managed to do it was by standing in the way of Kakashi, making a sacrifice for what he believed was right, in true Shinobi fashion.

It is here, standing with absolutely nothing, that Zabuza decides his final moments will be in taking down Gato. He takes one of Naruto's kunai in his mouth and charges, with this "demonic phantasm"<sup>[78]</sup> being eerily



similar to the manifestation of the Nine-Tails that spawned when Naruto held an unconscious Sasuke. In both cases, they got riled up enough to give everything in their heart to strike, so only by loving did Zabuza actually become a demon.

Gato actually gets beheaded in the manga as Zabuza stares into his soul and says "I'm taking you with me to Hell"<sup>[79]</sup> and watches his head roll into the mob. The main head of hydra goes down, but now all the thugs he hired aren't going to get paid - so they decide to loot any and all things from the village. It's too tall an order for Kakashi and even Naruto doesn't have enough chakra for all of them. But not all heroes wear capes (or headbands), some wear makeshift helmets and carry wooden crossbows. Inari has managed to gather everyone in the village to protect their homeland<sup>[80]</sup> and they come together to confront the sprawling remainder of Gato's men.

With that battle over, the Land of Waves is finally liberated! Inari seems revitalised and his happy childish self, which will surely reflect on the prosperity of the land and people. A job well done indeed for Team 7.

Next we see them gathered around the graves of the boy and his master, questioning what it really means to be a Shinobi. Kakashi, being a man who stands by the traditional warrior mentality, says it isn't up to him to question things<sup>[81]</sup>. He instils his faith into the Hokage and focuses on the mission. Naruto cannot accept this as an answer after seeing what Zabuza was deep down. His compassion went the extra mile, but in the same vein he also said "He's still my enemy"<sup>[82]</sup> - so would we say Naruto's nindo overreaches beyond the spheres of a Shinobi?

Well, he wants to supersede the prevailing ideology of people being tools for people being people, but ironically the former is vital to wage wars

against others. Should he succeed, Shinobi as such will no longer be necessary. Now that is in the spirit of self-sacrifice.

Naruto knows what saved him from the darkness were the bridges he built with people and seeing them go out of their way to help him beyond the standard definition of a Shinobi. “Naruto built the bridge that eventually carried us all to hope and courage [...] our bridge will become super-famous the world over, as a symbol of triumph and endurance”<sup>[83]</sup> - Tazuna. Naruto needs to take this metaphor and extend his relations far and wide, if he truly wishes to change the Ninja world. On the bridge is where Naruto first employed the Talk No Jutsu, which will come to be a valuable tool in his arsenal as that authenticity and emotion from him is what makes his inquiry so genuine.

## 2

# Sasuke's rebirth

*Naruto* is said to be a coming-of-age story where the young protagonist goes on a journey of self-discovery, and nowhere is the transition of boys to men more poignant than in the gruelling, sanguinary Chuunin exams. I won't spend much time analysing the written portion, as this just showcases the classic foolhardiness of Naruto and the ingenuity of other ninjas to attain information covertly. The meat and potatoes of this arc will be in the Forest, as it's where Kishimoto places the spotlight on Sasuke's development to come up to par with Naruto's recent successes.

How this is done is with a tried-and-tested method known colloquially as "The Hero's Journey", popularised by Joseph Campbell(1904-1987). In his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, it articulates the fundamental similarities in the narratives of the Hero figure, and how trials and obstacles have been structured much the same way throughout time. So far we've seen the initial stages in Naruto, by accepting *The Call to Adventure*, surmounting *The Refusal of the Call*, and enacting *Supernatural aid* during his fight against Haku in the form of the Nine-Tails. Despite Sasuke being the one who went head on in his fight against the demon brothers, he still needs to have his moment of abject despair against an opponent, for that will have to be transcended if he wants sustained conviction in his goals. Also, his Sharingan is an heirloom from his clan and doesn't qualify as "supernatural" in the Campbellian sense as the aid must be given from a more spiritual source<sup>[1]</sup>.

Other parts of the journey that get exemplified over this arc are more tangential to character development, as there is a subsection termed *The*

*Belly of the Whale*, whereby we could make parallels to the moment Naruto is swallowed up by the large summoning snake<sup>[2]</sup>, but the entrapment is really meant for self-reflection, whereas Naruto bursts out almost immediately.

Whilst the Hero's Journey does a good job at providing the blueprint for storytelling, it needs to be coupled with some finer-grained tools for how characters will be depicted. In the Land of Waves we had a lot of symbolism from Shinto mythology and Samurai history to steer Zabuza, Haku and Inari a certain way, but here we will have a radically different instrument - Kabuki.

## It's just pretend!

One of Japan's most recognisable cultural exports, Kabuki theatre started at the turn of the seventeenth century and has remained in the cultural zeitgeist ever since. At the time of its inception, *kabuku* meant something along the lines of "eccentric dancing", but the Kanji which make up Kabuki nowadays is composed of "song"(ka/歌), "dance"(bu/舞) and "skill"(ki/伎). Additionally, the kanji which makes up "drama"(*geki* 劇) consists of three parts: the abbreviations for "tiger"(虎), "wild boar"(猪) and "sword"(刀). It's meant to encapsulate the back-and-forth battle between two equal forces, using their tusks and claws like swords<sup>[3]</sup>. What we see is that Kabuki is a *ferce* art form, but the drama doesn't get going until Sasuke accepts the challenge.

Things had started quite innocuously as their first opponent made a poor replication of Naruto's appearance, missing many crucial details like the shuriken holster on the wrong leg, missing the cut on his face and so on<sup>[4]</sup>; but when Orochimaru makes his grand entrance, between the explosions

and gusts of wind, they can't tell whether this serpentine look is a costume or whether he truly is a freak of nature.

The peculiarity of him being in the body of a woman is confusing until you realise the role of the *onnagata* (player of women's roles) in Kabuki theatre. Due to the prohibition on actresses to get involved, men had to learn how to embody the nature of a woman, and the audience would be titillated if they could question their disbelief<sup>[5]</sup>. Sakura cannot figure out whether Orochimaru is truly a snake or not, and is repulsed when she sees him do things like swallow the entire scroll before fighting them<sup>[6]</sup>.

So far, Sasuke has managed to keep his cool, but when he's suddenly met with those iconic snake eyes, it triggers a wicked hallucination that makes him believe he is witnessing his own death. He's terrified for the first time since "that day" and cannot compose himself to fight the opponent in front of him. The edgy and stoic demeanour he uses as a wall against his past shatters, and he is now the seven year old boy who has lost everything. His paralysis mirrors Naruto during the Land of Waves when the two Hidden Mist ninja attacked them at the start of their mission - Naruto hadn't even remotely considered the possibility, and hence he froze stiff; Sasuke just about gathers the courage to snap himself out of it by stabbing himself in the leg and carries a petrified Sakura out of the battlefield.

Orochimaru's glare was typical of a *mie*, which is a technique that can be thought of as analogous to dramatic pauses. Here the actor has to freeze in position and allow the stance to exemplify the emotion he wishes to portray; some examples listed include sticking out the tongue, flashing pronounced grimaces and so forth<sup>[7]</sup>, all favourites of our current villain<sup>[8]</sup>.

As he ascends the tree in search of his prey<sup>[9]</sup>, it resembles the nature of the snake in Michelangelo's *Temptation and Expulsion*, one of the classic

paintings in the Sistine Chapel denoting paradise on the left-side and hell on the right. You can see that Eve and the demon touch, whereas in the painting of Adam and God in the *Creation of Adam*, they don't. I believe it signifies our current disconnect from the divine and our domain is instead in the deep, dark forest. Many times Orochimaru tries to make contact with Sasuke but Naruto continues to get in the way. He is appalled by his teammate's behaviour and calls him a "big chicken", another callback to the Land of Waves, with the roles staying reversed: those of the courageous Ninja and the coward alternating depending on their ability to face death. As soon as they entered the forest they needed a password to discern the real from the fake, and Naruto half-jokingly said that the kid standing in front of him is the real fraud<sup>[10]</sup>.

Seeing this, Sasuke probably thinks he's useless and needs more power; in truth Naruto is only managing to serve as the avenger with the subsidies granted by the Nine-Tails. In time, when he's bestowed his own wellspring of strength (which we shall see shortly) he was able to protect his friends too - so only incarnates of power can do the role it seems. This interpretation is a little low resolution though, as it's incarnates who have the power *under their control*, directing it toward their goals. As Orochimaru notes: "After being trapped within him for a dozen years, the demon fox and Naruto's native chakra and psyche have apparently gone from enmity and opposition to coexistence... and are on the very brink of symbiosis!"<sup>[11]</sup><sub>1</sub>.

Orochimaru shackles away Naruto's powers with another seal and throws him to one side - now for the prize! Sakura manages to stop his fall and scolds Sasuke for freezing up and being a coward - at least Naruto's trying! With all defences down, she triggers the memories of Itachi: "Hate me and

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<sup>1</sup> Kishimoto leaned heavily into reflecting Orochimaru as he would've been in the play *The Tale of the Gallant Jiraiya* by having him use antiquated vocabulary, as Kabuki actors were known to do in their lines<sup>[12]</sup>.

live. Like the coward you are! Cling to life... without honour!"<sup>[13]</sup>. Those close to him are being picked off, and he's doing nothing to prevent their deaths... like last time. Has it all been for nothing, will he fail in his vendetta?! "No!" he bellows<sup>[14]</sup>!

In an attempt to take control of the situation, a panicked Sasuke had tried to think rationally and offer the scroll to Orochimaru, believing that they were playing the same game; but now he accepts that he can no longer be a dispassionate spectator and must leap into drama. In the book *Kabuki, Baroque fusion of the arts*, Kawatake Toshio mentions this ensnaring quality as one of its greatest strengths, as the essence of theatre isn't to allow an audience to process a play by reason and deduction, but rather to have them caught in a shared rapture<sup>[15]</sup>. This was Sasuke's last logical attempt at interacting with Orochimaru before having to succumb to the fact that he has to build a narrative himself - he is the Avenger.

His sight is sharp once again, and one thing worth noting is that when the summoning snake is released and the smoke covers his eyes, he doesn't blink or waver, for they have set their target<sup>[16]</sup>. I guess it's no coincidence that Kabuki is said to be the theatre of the eye<sup>[17]</sup>, with one stare countering another, and red is reserved for the upright hero<sup>[18]</sup>, with red makeup going on the corner of the eyes to denote bravery and righteousness.

He runs head-first into certain death, but Orochimaru isn't going to kill him, he wants to play and find the scope of his abilities. This is where we see Sasuke shine and his ability to anticipate his opponent's moves and strategize is back. The anime does a much better job than the manga in illustrating the fact that Sasuke was able to deceive Orochimaru, as in the latter he uses a simple bluff, whereas in the former he played dead and got Orochimaru to walk right into position.

Seeing that we was able to trick the snake of all snakes, he is ingratiated into the deeper circles of hell. He says his name is Orochimaru, whereby Orochi translates to 'Large Snake', but specifically of monstrous proportions, and Maru is a standard male suffix; however, if you were to literalise all the Kanji in his name: large(大), snake(蛇) and circle(丸) you could make the connection to the Ouroboros, the eternally renewing serpent.

It's interesting how this particular conclusion skews the age-old Christian myth of Adam and Eve, as Sasuke wasn't tempted to partake in the "fruit" - rather in this myth the fruit was stamped onto him; the snake took it upon itself to force the subject to ingest it which paints an altogether different picture and should mean Sasuke is exempt from Original Sin. He didn't have the choice and thus shouldn't be ostracised and thrown into chaos; however, the curse mark has the Logos of the Devil, it warns us that the snake lurks in the shadow of any individual possessing it and thus a perception of darkness shrouds them. It will thus become an uphill battle to maintain the bonds between family, friends and teachers - the last couple of threads keeping Sasuke bound to the village.

I think some other points worth pondering in the creation myth is that neither Adam or Eve died from eating the fruit itself, but died from being banished. The curse mark could have and has killed people who tried to harness it in fairness, and it was said the fruit would kill those who tried; but I think it's more correct to say that the fruit induces a trip to the underworld whereby recognition of one's mortality, oneself as naked, are the case for those that manage to come back.

As Sasuke lies unconscious from the battle, we get glimpses into his psyche, where he's seeing his younger self and his trauma is being recited, but this time it's weaponised by this power-hungry personality. This is the bridge



which connects to the darkness of Pure Hatred, which may have been recycled when Naruto went to the Waterfall of Truth. The younger self also performs the same act as Orochimaru of "pulling away the skin" to reveal the snake's eye<sup>[19]</sup>, which serves to hint at a greater power: the dream conveys the message that this is where progress lies. It sheds the first layer much like the snake sheds its skin in an act of rebirth, giving the chance for Sasuke to be reborn in the image of the Avenger. But once again, the actions aren't just symbolic but constitutive of Kabuki dynamics, as a change in personality of the character is often shown by differences in costume<sup>[20]</sup>; removal of the outer layer tries to exemplify a facet of their "true nature", and alarmingly Sasuke's *self* is seen as getting in the way.

Orochimaru is the ticket out of despair, despite being seen as the dark and reprehensible force of evil a few moments ago. He is the announcer of adventure, the initiator of the heroic path, but such a herald can often be viewed as evil by the world<sup>[21]</sup>. What's more, the herald often appears in dreams for the hero that needs a new world-orientation<sup>[22]</sup>, and at the dawn of this new stance, what was considered valuable yesterday can become empty by sunrise.

The herald can be considered a figure of evil because of their ability to separate the hero from the standard modes of culture, governance and so forth, thus being a force of negation it can put them in the same class as demons. Orochimaru doesn't enact this change hoping that Sasuke will come to transcend the previous epoch of values and improve upon them, but rather to have him solely for his own benefit.

There is a saying among Kabuki actors that one has to enter the mould, then destroy it<sup>[23]</sup>. What this means is that you have to delve deep into the traditional displays and performances of your part, and whence you have understood all the idiosyncrasies you may be able to expand beyond it. This

envelopment is a critical moment for Sasuke, since he has just taken up the mantle of the character of the Avenger and affiliation to Orochimaru, as it's what constitutes something *real*, but there is no talk of breaking free...

As he begins to scrap with Zaku, Orochimaru's theme is playing and we see images of him flash in the minds of both Sakura and the Sound ninja, as they see the comparison is startling<sup>[24]</sup>. He is beginning to toy with his prey and takes pleasure in torturing them, a level of sadism seen only in the most malevolent characters in the series. He has a massive grin on his face as he remarks that Zaku seems "quite attached" to his arms, and proceeds to rip them off their joints.

"I understand now. I am an avenger. On the path I walk, I have to do whatever it takes to gain power ... even if it means selling my flesh to the devil"<sup>[25]</sup>. That articulate affirmation of his is much clearer than the bumbling drivel he said during the bell exercise, and every aspect that Orochimaru wanted to achieve he has accomplished: To establish a relationship with Sasuke, to solve his psychological pain and to make him stronger.

Dosu ponders at the end, "You ordered us to murder Sasuke, but you got to him first! And instead of killing him, you marked him with that curse. What's your game?"<sup>[26]</sup>. The answer is simple, Orochimaru wanted to test whether the seedling was worth any value, to force the curse mark into activation and measure their compatibility. But beyond the biological sense, this energy syncs with his spirit - "Orochimaru's curse mark is all too compatible with Sasuke's wicked thirst for revenge"<sup>[27]</sup>.

One stark difference between Sasuke and Naruto's maximising of their respective dark energies is that Sasuke's transformation was cut short by Sakura, whereas Naruto had the ability to restrain himself when he saw

Haku, so does it mean Sasuke will continue to rampage without someone to interject? As he comes out of the curse mark's effects, he seems to be puzzled and shaken - staring at his hands saying "what happened to me"<sup>[28]</sup> as if another person had just puppeted him. That brief moment of certainty is gone and now he's back to his old self where everything is unclear.

## The beginning of myth

I want to recap what we've seen so far, but with our mythological glasses on, keeping note of the themes which crop up. Now the first myth I shall cover is also the oldest we have records of - dated to around 2000 BC - and that is the Mesopotamian story of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. To be clear, Kishimoto hasn't used this as source material, it's just incredible that the number of repeated motifs hasn't changed after all this time.

Gilgamesh, the reigning Emperor of Uruk is the protagonist who is representative of Sasuke and his friend Enkidu is symbolised in Naruto. The first time they meet, they brawl and the result is the same as our protagonists' first meeting as children; afterwards, they manage to cultivate a strong bond and become good friends<sup>[29]</sup>. As a side note, it is peculiar that Gilgamesh as the reigning emperor enjoyed the benefit of *droit du seigneur* ("The Lord's Right", to sleep with a man's wife) and Sasuke seems to have the attention of all the girls his age; likewise Enkidu is the primitive man on the outskirts of society, and when Naruto was first being introduced he was seen performing the harem jutsu, and Enkidu was ingratiated into society by a temple-prostitute called Shamhat<sup>[30]</sup>.

The two make preparations to head for the Cedar Forest, where the protector Humbaba lives as they want to slay him and take some of the wood home. Initially it is Gilgamesh who is the strong-willed and calls out Enkidu for being the weakling<sup>[31]</sup>, for he has the courage to ride a road he

knows not, face a battle he knows not and plunge into the depths; since Enkidu has been living in the wild he shall be their guide, but some wise words before they set off: “Do not rely, O Gilgamesh, on your strength alone, look long and hard, land a blow you can count on! ‘Who goes in front will save his comrade, who knows the road shall [guard] his friend’”<sup>[32]</sup>.

As they make their way to the Cedar Forest, Gilgamesh has a series of terrifying oracular visions, though Enkidu manages to interpret them all positively and keeps him moving forward. For Sasuke, when meeting Orochimaru he had the experience of seeing his very own death which petrified him, but Naruto still wanted him to fight and avoid surrendering. Here we see our first inversion, as Humbaba adorned an intimidating mask which caused Gilgamesh to run and hide<sup>[33]</sup>, whereas it was the *removal* of Orochimaru’s face, to reveal his eyes and more, which caused Sasuke to cower. Enkidu manages to revive his warrior spirit and they slay the beast and return home with the Cedar wood.

From here on, the Mesopotamian myth and our tale diverges, but by the end Gilgamesh knows of the meaning of fate and the reason death has been placed upon man. Sasuke would come to accept a similar thing as he found the meaning of his existence and felt his calling as an avenger, no longer afraid of death or uncertainty.

The first surviving version of the text has the Babylonian title “He who saw the Deep”, or “He who saw the Abyss/Unknown” and the moment he opened his eyes Sasuke took that leap as well, when he decided to walk in front and protect his comrades.

## Out of the woods

We see Team 7 walk into the central tower to be briefed by Iruka on the true purpose of the task, which was merely to test “the applicants’ basic Chuunin abilities”<sup>[34]</sup>. That some students have probably had to dig into the depths of their souls just to survive and take massive risks for success - and to be told it was just an assessment of their ability to handle a single mission must be hard to swallow. Will it take this level of resolve for every mission? This is what separates the boys from the men. Just how well they can get up and fight the next day, with another test of character just around the corner as the preliminaries start.

If this wasn't already a blunt enough realisation that the way of the Ninja is brutal, the Hokage illustrates to them clearly that the reason they're here in the first place is to be a representative of their nation; to be assessed on how well they can be used, and whether such prowess is convincing enough to reward them with contracts(missions). He goes on to say that the exam's true purpose isn't just to maintain friendships with allies, though honestly I have no idea how this would be as you kill off their Ninja on your own soil, and if your village is stronger you take away work from them. A host nation has a clear incentive to interfere and kill off other candidates as it means they won't get missions in future, but I digress. He dubs the exams “a war in miniature between all of our allied lands”<sup>[35]</sup>: all the untalented pawns cancel each other out and what we want to see is who has the most gifted and remarkable Shinobi: the judges have their eyes on those with Kekkei Genki, multiple changes in chakra nature and so forth.

There is one such candidate of particular interest, being the pride of the Uchiha and all, but his curse mark threatens to end his journey right here and now as it's flaring up, and Sakura wishes to report it for his own health. Sasuke says “it’s my decision ... and it’s none of your business”<sup>[36]</sup> which is total nonsense, she has helped him survive and been there on each of the critical junctures of his path. He seems to have forgotten the meaning of

being in a team and the lessons which Kakashi instilled, allowing the curse mark to be something which can sit in between his teammates and lessen their influence, as Orochimaru hoped it would.

With this fight with Yaroï, he realised that he can't use his sharingan, nor the curse mark and barely any chakra - which sounds like the initial conditions of another ninja which beat him...

At one point the curse mark starts flaring up, and since Sasuke is physically and mentally drained it almost completely takes over, with a watchful Orochimaru salivating: the seedling is so close to being consumed! But he manages to claw back control, and this only makes Orochimaru grow in his obsession for him as he pulls away from his personal gift. He obviously liked the look in his eye when they first met and the Sharingan is the cherry on top.

After the match he is quickly escorted out and Kakashi performs the sealing jutsu, though it isn't much of a seal as it relies on the person's Will to keep the curse mark in check; if Sasuke so wishes, the curse mark will flare up and the seal won't do much to get in the way. This may be what Orochimaru realised when he went snooping, as he wanted to see if this would actually pose a threat to his plans. Evidently not. He knows Sasuke will begin to romanticise the effects of the curse mark and will long for the benefits of it in battle. The true seal, the meta-seal if you will, are the friends and teachers, the village and his teammates which he needs to immerse himself in whilst slowly gaining control over it. He needs to *incorporate* the seal where possible, not solely relying on it over the strength in his team. But again, as we know, Sasuke's mission has no room for another.

# 3

## Bushy Brows

After all that talk of myth and the divine, demons and snakes and whatnot, it's time to get back to some grass-roots stuff: to one boy who possessed none of the intrinsic qualities of being a superstar ninja. Rock Lee is a character who Kishimoto had in mind to portray the image of human weakness<sup>[1]</sup>, and how someone with effectively no bloodline traits, no ninjutsu, just their raw "humanness" would fare. It's due to this that we can easily relate to Lee and there is a direct route to inspiration, through him we see things are *possible*. When Naruto saves the world with his summoning jutsu, shadow clones and other such magic it can leave someone like us bereft as we're saddened by the fact we may need this level of strength to save the day. Lee says we can survive without such things and even compete against other ninja.

To be clear, Lee isn't the main protagonist and isn't the "best character" for *Naruto* as many people think he is, as he represents someone who is trying to vanquish enemies (no matter how honourably) and would've killed people that Naruto could manage to help. The truer message of the series is that we can for the majority of enemies see the human in them, dialogue with them and avoid furthering the cycle of hatred. Lee is embedded within the Shinobi system but he is definitely an exemplary warrior since he has clear self-rule and uses appropriate force against opponents. Clear inspirations for the creation of Rock Lee was Bruce Lee as he inherits the same hairstyle, incredible physicality and unwavering philosophy. The self-rule, incredible strictness of training and the sheer number of repetitions he does, it's not uncommon to hear Lee shouting numbers above 500 when doing any particular exercise. "I fear not the man who has

practiced 10,000 kicks once, but I fear the man who has practiced one kick 10,000 times " - Bruce Lee.

In addition to this resemblance there is another man, someone who completely embodied Lee's philosophy which is the American boxer Rocky Marciano. Born in 1923, with his professional career starting in 1948, he had none of the attributes that mark a world champion: average height, small reach, small hands, no technique or natural aptitude... But he had one thing that kept him apart from everybody else: sheer determination and never ever giving up. He simply refused to be knocked down and never lost a fight in his entire heavyweight career. Marciano had the flame sparked during his childhood as he watched his father toil away endlessly at a job he hated and vowed to liberate him one day.

He trained levels beyond the competition, with a specialised punching bag four times the weight of a regular. He went on runs longer than anybody else and cultivated a superhuman endurance. During fights with Marciano his opponents would contract unheard of injuries: nerve damage in the arm from a single punch, teeth getting crushed into their gums and so on. But with his brute-force and war-like approach to combat he suffered his fair share of injuries too. In his fight against Ezzard Charles in 1954 he sustained a nose cut so bloody that his trainer said at the end of the seventh round "If you don't get him in the next you'll bleed to death". Rocky got the victory in the eighth round of the match.

These scars of war, the consequences of being human, are something that each man (fictional or not) can attest to as being the result of their unwillingness to surrender in the face of pain and hardship. The first time we saw Lee he showed off his unparalleled physicality by blocking both kicks from Sasuke and Kotetsu when he was on the way to handing in his Chuunin application form<sup>[2]</sup>. He seemingly managed to deceive the eyes of



Sasuke as he remarked "he stopped my kick with his arm, no human alive can do that"<sup>[3]</sup>. Now, Taijutsu is essentially martial arts, which relies on one's physical energy and *can* be combined with chakra like the Gentle Fist Taijutsu; however, the remark is made to highlight the fact that Lee's ability is practically superhuman as anyone else would've needed chakra to bolster their grip. It may also have to do with Sasuke not really pushing his body as hard as Lee, due to relying on ninjutsu, and doesn't know of anyone that could possess such capability. He goes on to fight Lee and gets schooled because he hasn't trained to a point where he can reap the full rewards of his Sharingan. His confusion stems from the fact that he can't figure out what "magic" (his words in the dubbed anime) is responsible for Lee's kicks landing. He charges in for another shot and gets caught with the now classic picture of the kick to the face<sup>[4]</sup>. Straight martial arts, no trickery, just superhuman speed. As Lee says: "Even if you can perfectly perceive and understand my movements, you lack the speed and strength to counter them. You haven't had the physical training necessary to keep up with me!"<sup>[5]</sup>.

Lee is beginning to revel in being right, he senses that all his hard work has actually paid off. In this moment of ecstasy he begins to waver in his sense of appropriate force as the bandages around his arms unfurl to set up the Hidden Lotus. "Now I will prove my point. That hard work beats out natural talent"<sup>[6]</sup>. No sooner than that does Guy burst forth from the clouds and literally hit some sense into him. Lee starts jabbering some excuses for why he lost his head, but that in itself is worthy of punishment as a Ninja must stay cool in the heat of battle.

Sasuke is left to ponder how the hell he lost to someone so eccentric and growls in frustration. Lee later discloses that he wasn't the one he wanted to prove himself against - his truest test is Neji. So he's been called out as weak and as a mere punching bag, on top of that he's only second on his list

of interests. The loss is actually good for him as by the end he has a fire in his belly to work hard and maximise his potential, but I don't think Sasuke ever comes close to incorporating Lee's routine into his own training. Could you imagine if Sasuke tried to do Lee's daily workout? He would get to about 100 push ups and shout "Ugh, I'm such a loser... Why can I only do 100??" then go on an existential tirade followed by bouts of depression and rage. Jokes aside, it takes serious mental control to focus one's attention on the exercise one is performing day in and day out, which is why the mental benefits of exercise resemble those gained from meditation: being in the moment. Lee veered from principles he knows he shouldn't violate, which is the same as letting his mind wander. That would've never gotten him to where he is now, so Guy basically beats it out of him and gets him to do laps, to be focused once again.

Interestingly, before he engaged with Sasuke he said: "I'm sorry Master Guy ... I may have to break the big rule! I might need that move!"<sup>[7]</sup>. He did it because he wanted to get the proof "you require Master Guy"<sup>[8]</sup> which is bizarre as *he* isn't the one who needs proof, it's Lee who wants to confirm he is on the right path. He always feels that he has to compare himself, and he's willing to throw away everything that got him here in the first place to beat Neji.

This leads us to a point of inquiry - how should a martial artist incorporate rules into their development? Well, individual schools will ask all their students to adopt principles and specific practices, because teachers want to bring them into the Way of martial arts, but not all students may resonate with those techniques - hopefully they don't mistake it for the entire Way of martial arts itself. The best students will get the gist of the Path with almost no effort needed to convince them as it flows as part of their own, but it is very unlikely that your way of martial arts will sit squarely with the entirety of a given school. And so, unless Lee is just like Guy which - no

matter how hard he tries - he is not, then he will have to eventually find a style which best expresses himself.

There is a great passage in *The Book of Family Traditions on the Art of War* by famed swordsmen and combative master Yagyū Munenori which speaks to this effect, essentially rejecting the need for any martial artist to hold any creed or principle as universal. The heart must be kept empty not only to allow new ideas to come in, but Munenori states you have to let go of the idea of *martial arts*, and until that happens you will not be a maestro. If you are so intent on winning that you cannot let it go, it is a sure sign you will lose. In fact he goes so far as to call this attitude a sickness<sup>[9]</sup>. For archers in particular, gripping too tightly causes an overload of tension, leading to inaccuracy. As Bruce Lee often said, “Be like water”.

However, just as water can take the shape of the cup, the bottle, the teapot, what’s stopping Lee from now whimsically taking up any particular form? If we look at the “geniuses” for a moment we see they relate to the Way of the Shinobi quite differently as it is one method of expressing something deeper about their character. For example, Sasuke wants to get stronger so he can kill his brother, Neji is getting stronger because deep down he wants to be free and acknowledged as an equal to the Head Family, Naruto’s getting stronger because he wants to be respected among all the villagers and so on and so forth. By having something preceding the Shinobi, the way “Shinobi-hood” shapes itself is totally unique to the individual.

Going back to Lee’s graduation from the academy, Guy asked each of them what their goals were, to which he said: “I want to prove that even a person who can’t use Ninjutsu or Genjutsu can still become a splendid Ninja! It’s my only goal!”<sup>[10]</sup>. I wonder why Kishimoto stressed the last part. My suspicion is that he’s trying to illustrate that this obsession to compare himself with Neji isn’t his primary purpose, and he uses those battles to

confirm his fundamental driving philosophy. It's reminiscent of when Haku found Naruto in the woods and asked him: "Are you doing this for the sake of that person... or for your own satisfaction?"<sup>[11]</sup>, but Lee has added so many caveats onto his goals like self-rules, no trickery and deception<sup>[12]</sup> that it's impossible to tell what point he's trying to prove. Naruto actually beat Neji by using trickery and became the exemplary ninja that Lee could've been if he introduced some mischievousness and cheekiness into his game.

I won't be too hard on Lee though as he's still young, and he's constantly making improvements. Take the Forest of Death for example where he finds a moment to do another one of his challenges, this time he will try to catch all the leaves before they fall to the ground. He's grabbed all but one leaf, but he sees a squirrel about to get caught in a paper-bomb, which does he choose? He bets that if he could catch each one it's a step closer to Sakura falling in love with him, but here he chose to save the Squirrel and forgo his own training. Guy probably didn't lecture him on the prioritisation of squirrels but about general moral principles, which he chooses to apply to anyone in danger. The creature is saved<sup>[13]</sup> and we pan over to see the last leaf on the floor. Lee's priority is people, which is why he jumps in to save Sakura from the Sound Ninja ambush. In particular, she is "very precious" to him which is why the rule for the Hidden Lotus is met.

The Forest of Death is a process by which villages of every nation voluntarily subject their Ninja to Darwinian-style elimination as they try and gauge which of their own has the abilities to survive in such an environment. Lee completely bypasses the cutthroat idiosyncrasies of nature and chooses to put himself in jeopardy for love. Lee's actions cause the otherwise opportunistic and tentative Team 10(Team Asuma) to step in. Without Lee's courage I doubt they'd have acted. All because of one man trying to save his crush. Even when he is nearly unconscious from the beat-down and disoriented, he manages to run over and throw a kick

towards Dosu but fails<sup>[14]</sup>. We herald Lee as brave and trying to overcome the disadvantage he's at for not having any special weapons like the Sound Ninja; Sakura instead of rising to the occasion and helping Lee, sat back and let him handle it<sup>[15]</sup>. Eventually, after every single option is exhausted she finds the courage to follow the examples of Naruto, Sasuke and Lee. She cuts off her hair<sup>[16]</sup> which in Japanese society marks the end of an era - it was tradition that a Samurai cut their top-knot to show the end of their tenure; however, here Sakura cuts her hair to show the end of her life as a child and the start of responsibility.

After all is settled she says "Lee... Thank you. Thanks to your help, I've made some kind of breakthrough. My skills have been taken to a whole new level"<sup>[17]</sup>. Both characters were designed by Kishimoto to illustrate the complexities of being human and how often we make mistakes and stumble through life, and here there is an exploration into addressing those weaknesses.

## The Forest of Death: The demon is home sweet home

Now for the total opposite of morality and kindness. Meet Gaara, a murderous psychopath who killed a couple of mist ninja because they looked at him the wrong way<sup>[18]</sup>. In that clash Gaara toyed with his prey not just because of a degree of sadistic enjoyment like Orochimaru but partly boredom. He didn't care to ask which scroll they had, killing them was like scratching an itch. The way he crushes them and makes it rain with their disintegrated flesh is morbidly beautiful and in the spirit of a God to play and tease mortals. This is probably why Hinata, Kiba and Shino went from idle spectators to running for their lives; Gaara isn't solely torturous though as he says himself - "I used far more force than was necessary"<sup>[19]</sup>. It was painless and his death was a kind of ritual feeding the chaos within. Having this careless attitude of death is in stark contrast to any other Ninja as he

himself knows that nobody here could kill him and waltzes through the forest in a staggering 97 minutes.

## The preliminaries: Bushy Brows versus No eyebrows

As the names are selected you can tell they are both eager to fight, Gaara prematurely goes to the battleground despite his name not even showing up. Lee is his opponent and he proceeds to do something which I don't think his character ever does again: impulsively throwing the stopper of his gourd at Lee's face<sup>[20]</sup>... you get the sense the addict is ready for his fill.

Lee starts off by fighting Gaara much the same way I would, just swing some punches and kicks to see what happens. We can all see ourselves in that ring, we follow Lee's progression throughout the match and we're lifted into the realm of the "supernaturally achievable": leg weights are tools some of us have at home and Lee inspires us to perform the exact same training, though I won't be *quite* as fast. We don't need some inexplicable, convoluted magic but the things I have scattered in my room to fight this demon. The leg weights plummeting into the ground is without a shadow of a doubt one of the most memorable moments in all of *Naruto* as it illustrates pure, unfettered wonder; the sand is no longer an adequate shield and he's outside the protection of his mother for the first time, seeming well and truly spooked.

Gaara had "never been hurt", neither had he been beaten in training and destroyed his muscles from overwork, grinding himself to the bone for that extra one percent improvement. Gaara has no idea the resolve it took Lee to master this level of martial arts and he no longer has the smugness to just stand there. You would think that never feeling any pain would be heavenly, and all of Lee's exhausting regiments would be hell, but it seems the opposite is true. Gaara has to start defending himself and come up with

a strategy pronto! The next couple sequences highlight the shifting tide, where Lee was the human and Gaara the supernatural force, but by the end of the last punch<sup>[21]</sup> we can feel the roles have been reversed. Gaara begins to feel flustered as he's thrown to the ground, forcing the sand armour to save him.

After seeing that the damage was negligible, Lee decides to up the force massively but if he'd just kept to his principles of patience and consistency Gaara wouldn't have been able to maintain that suit of armour for long - though he couldn't have known this in the heat of battle. Behind the armour he saw the demon grinning maniacally and got a shiver<sup>[22]</sup>, which probably shook him into using a more powerful technique like the lotus.

He decides to go straight for it just like the fight against the Sound Ninja and puts all his faith into such a double-edged technique that can leave himself seriously vulnerable if it fails. The same technique flopped against those three because he hadn't tested the scope of their abilities and he presumes the only thing Gaara is going to do is hurl sand at him and stand there, so he bets on it.

Strategy is of such importance and it's an aspect of combat that Lee needs to work on. People cushioning their falls was in the end the same refutation<sup>[23]</sup> which highlights an awareness that Lee doesn't have. Making the same mistakes over and over is another common human weakness. When he was setting up the lotus, the series of kicks needed caused him to wince in pain for just a moment<sup>[23]</sup> and he shut his eyes. It's amazing that Munenori's book has a quip for such a moment, as he says that if you delay a strike for the time it takes to blink an eye, you will have already lost<sup>[24]</sup>...

It's at this point in Lee's struggle that the anime takes us briefly outside the fight and into Lee's upbringing, and a look behind the scenes for what made

him the man he is today. After being picked on and slated for being weak, Lee sticks around after school and continues to work long after everyone else would've been asleep, the sheer tolerance for pain is staggering and it's probably why he doesn't mind using the lotus so early on. In fact, the only thing which breaks him and drops him to his knees during training was the weakening of his own convictions. He was starting to question the point behind it all in light of so many failures. If he's only going to get beaten by Neji, why does he spend all this time practising? Lee crumbles in front of him one evening and confesses: "I've wondered if it was possible for hard work alone to be rewarded... So I've kept challenging Neji but the results have always been the same. And even now, on missions, my legs still tremble in fear, fear that no matter how hard I work I'll never get stronger.... I don't know what to do"<sup>[25]</sup>.

"All your hard work will prove worthless ... unless you believe in yourself"<sup>[26]</sup>. If you don't believe then all this is just wasted energy as you're acting on behalf of some image of a person that's not you, the one that in moments you needed it most will dissolve as it wasn't your innermost conviction. It seemed to be after this point that Lee began to imitate his sensei even more, as he wanted to use the character to find out who he was and what resonated with him. Turns out, they share an awful lot in common and they're practically father and son, but if Lee wants to be a truly splendid Shinobi he has to find his own style.

If he's facing the same result every time, then dare I say it you may need to find more than one teacher to train you. All the Shinobi who became truly great had many mentors to guide them: Sasuke had Kakashi and Orochimaru, Naruto had Kakashi, Jiraiya, Lord Fukasaku and so on. This goes back to the aforementioned segment on schools. Lee is a genius of hard work<sup>[27]</sup> after all so I have no doubt he could eat up whatever regiments his teachers set for him.



Back to the fight. Seeing as the first lotus failed it's time now to stake absolutely everything - opening all the way up to the fifth gate. A technique which removes the normal regulations on the body, chakra delimiters are opened allowing huge spikes in energy to fill the user at the cost of severe bodily strain. He becomes a fully-fledged demon of his own, as I like to think the red represents rage in that cliché poetic way. If he wasn't fast enough before, now he's travelling at speeds which only the visionary gods can perceive, transforming into a performance fleeting from ordinary eyes - only Kakashi's Sharingan and Neji's Byakugan can really tell what's going on.

It is at this point Lee becomes *symbolic*, rising from being a particular case to a guiding principle for how we can achieve such strength ourselves. There's only one problem: Lee remains human and as such the demands of being a God shreds his body apart and his muscles are splintering like an old rope bridge as he delivers the final sequence. Gaara was struggling before and got backed into a corner, keeping to his sand armour but now it's crumbling away, and he even questions whether Lee is human<sup>[28]</sup>. Gaara is in a vacuum of beatdowns, a moment consisting of only suffering by a force totally outside of his ability to influence, only stopping due to its own circumstances. Here the demon understands what Hell *feels* like instead of imparting it on others for once.

There are so many opposing dynamics in this fight that it's almost impossible to count, but I shall go through some of the main ones. One of them being that Gaara is fighting for a village which hates him, which wants nothing to do with him and yet uses him as a bastion of their strength. This is only due to his raw power, but what's funny is that a large percentage of the villagers probably hope he doesn't come back, just as his father thought he had gone past his sell-by date; conversely, Lee is the symbol that the average Leaf village Shinobi can look up to but he won't be

the bastion of the Leaf as that role is for the freak-shows like Neji and Sasuke.

Contrasting battle styles, Gaara's way of fighting is so impersonal and distant, he doesn't even touch you, he just watches you get crushed. Whereas Lee's fighting style is literally up close and personal and his knuckles are the ones doing damage. Gaara is a child that has been born with the abilities he bears, and hasn't had to train a day in his life though Lee has had to work everyday without the notion of a break to carve out a semblance of Shinobi.

Gaara carved the word 'love' into his forehead as he believes himself to be truly alone, though he is constantly within the protection of his mother and within the powers of the sand spirit; Lee however is only fighting with his own Will, his own experience and abilities but never considers himself isolated, nor does he feel that his Sensei is absent from his side. This feeling manifests as Guy has to eventually step in before Lee is unduly killed.

Gaara sees his lifeless body get stretchered out and he's in disbelief as to why someone who lost has any value attached to them at all. This is more exemplary of Gaara's own feelings of utility and he's probably projecting trauma from his childhood. When the image of being a protector was no longer warranted there was an effort to assassinate him, so he has learnt to evaluate other people in the same way. Guy gives him the answer, that Lee is unquestionably, regardless of any result, deeply precious to him<sup>[29]</sup>. This notion has long been repressed in Gaara and through this hard fought battle we feel that his mental stability has begun to wobble and images from deep within resurface. He grows increasingly unstable due to the nature of the fight and the message that someone can be precious "no matter what".

The doctors bring Guy to one side and tell him that due to the severe injuries on his right arm and leg he will never be a Shinobi again<sup>[30]</sup>. Yet another pertinent human weakness, which is reeling from the consequences of our actions long after we've performed them. He was willing to fight whilst completely unconscious, not going to stop until his body physically couldn't send the electrical signals for movement. If that's your fight plan, then you have to accept the sheer amount of pain and suffering that comes with it.

A lot of viewers were disheartened at the result as we embodied ourselves in Lee the entire fight and to see our exemplary Shinobi get beaten in battle cuts deep. Gaara is using the "gifts" bequeathed to him to walk away victorious but I argue that Lee is still not using his incredible endurance and consistency in the right way. I mentioned that what he really needed to do was keep Gaara under high pressure with fast bombardments of Taijutsu as he can keep that pace up for hours, Lee wins any war of attrition. He is currently fighting almost against his gift as he uses techniques which render his body unable to stay in it for the long haul.

Nevertheless, I implore everyone to take the story of Rock Lee into their hearts, but know that he is actually the mastery of *one half* of the Martial Artist: the rock that is the routine, that is toughness and unmoved determination; the other being the spiritual, the nature of water that makes the entire person adaptable.

## 4

### Hinata vs Neji : Staring contest

Naruto comes off of a win against Kiba, and Hinata though too shy to speak hands him some ointment for the cuts and bruises he's covered in - and just across is a scowling Neji who seems to have a problem with her kindness: "Well, aren't you looking carefree Lady Hinata"<sup>[1]</sup>. Neji is scarred by the loss of his father, and seeing Hinata is the representative of the main branch, she is the symbol of the people who made that decision and thus this charity only masks the depths of her cruelty. He has no intention of holding back, which is exactly what Kiba mentions to her right before the fight starts: "if they pair you off against that sand ninja... withdraw immediately! The same thing goes for Neji. If you have to face him, don't fight. Forfeit. He's so cruel to you ... you'd be torn to pieces"<sup>[2]</sup>. This little wrinkle is often forgotten but he incites fear into her just moments before the names are called out and shakes her belief that her Will can affect the outcome of the battle and so there's no point trying.

Now feeling even more apprehensive than normal, her lack of confidence is taken by Neji to mean she knows she'll lose, she isn't fit to be a ninja and she shouldn't be taking the exams. Hinata rebukes his theory and says she took them to see if she could change<sup>[3]</sup>: could she embody what it means to be a Shinobi? Not only is it a personal test, but it's acting in direct opposition to Neji's metaphysical beliefs - for whom Hinata's efforts are a futile illusion that she isn't willing to let go of. She's going through self-experimentation and doesn't yet know the answer which is why Neji's psychological breakdown is all the more damaging: "Lady Hinata ... you're the sheltered little baby of the main branch, aren't you? A failure always fails. And a weak personality won't become strong"<sup>[4]</sup>. Somewhere amongst

the rambling he adorns the robes of the oracle and articulates the meaning behind all her actions: "This courage you're displaying is just a bluff! In the truest, deepest part of your heart you're desperate to run away from here right now"<sup>[5]</sup>. He takes this opportunity to spout his nonsense as Hinata not only lacks the physical strength to stop him but also the philosophical verbiage to throw counters. It's like when people torture and abuse people to get confessions out of them as he doesn't care if the confession has nothing to do with reality, his primary concern is getting her to admit she's useless: "The way you're touching your lip, it's another of those tender, intimate behaviours that expresses the agitation in your heart ... it's a defensive reflex"<sup>[6]</sup>.

In the fight the two seem to be playing a game of Chess in that they try to land a decisive blow by predicting the moves of the other. Hinata is clearly a level below and makes moves which Neji can easily predict and lures her into traps. He's incredibly sly and doesn't outright "refute" them, but continues to lead Hinata into thinking she's landing successful hits - in reality she doesn't have much chakra at all coming out of her arm as the network has been shattered. She only realises this in their mutual exchange when Neji lands cleanly and Hinata doesn't do any damage.

Neji is shocked that this is the extent of the main branch's strength - I'm subservient to these people? But this is it, destiny smiles favourably on Neji outside of his initial misfortune as he's the clan prodigy, a genius and where "the blood of the Hyūga flows strongest in him". He can boast to people like Lee that "No matter how hard you try, you can't hope to beat me"<sup>[7]</sup>. But I wonder if he realises that kind of dynamic isn't destiny, as it isn't about general rules like 'Neji always beats Lee', because there may be some chain of events which leads to his defeat and that would sit perfectly fine within a deterministic universe. He's trying to impose his own Will and assurance

onto the future, which goes against the idea of letting things unfurl as and how it will.

There is an idea by the German philosopher Heidegger which is that of "Thrownness": that we cannot control the initial conditions of existence and we feel as if we have been "thrown" into the world and how this defines the state of our being. Neji has landed in unfortunate circumstances and lives enslaved under the seal of the main branch. What Neji won't accept however is that everyone *else* is thrown into whatever circumstances they cannot control as well and feels bitter towards people like Hinata. You could make an argument that she is enslaved, just to a different type of obligation. The Heir to the clan is their jewel, so Hinata must train to symbolise the clan's strength, study to symbolise the clan's intelligence and so on. The amount of pressure on people like her by her father can become overbearing, and she may be within a stronger cage as the elders worry about the ramifications of her actions more; if it's a deviant from the branch family, they were already deemed second rate, but if the main branch lets down the Hyūga it smears inadequacy across their best and brightest.

Hinata's getting flattened - badly - and has to pick herself up off the ground each time, testing her conviction, and just because they're fighting doesn't mean Neji's stopped peppering her with demoralising words. Naruto finally had enough and pipes up, "You can't just arbitrarily decide these things about other people, you fool! Show him, Hinata! Beat up this idiot!"<sup>[8]</sup>. Naruto continuously shouts as this battle is just as important for him (philosophically) as it is for Hinata. But there's absolutely no chance of winning and the probability is practically zero, so how does he square this with his theory of belief?

When you go into a fight it is a battle of what has been learnt by both sides and the mindset which orchestrates how you use those experiences. This latter part is what you can change during a match but what you haven't experienced can't be, which Naruto is conflating with his ideas of belief as guaranteeing a change in the outcome of the match. Belief is certainly important, and Naruto turns to Lee as proof of this sentiment, but this is only partially correct as Lee worked incredibly hard to get to where he is now, whereas Hinata is only just finding her confidence to commit. Lee even had an extra year to make sure he could go toe to toe with the best. He was given direction and a path to follow which he jumped into with both feet. Hard work and guts means nothing if you don't have direction as you're just aimlessly rushing to different goals and you don't develop. Hinata sure as hell worked hard here, but this is the first step.

She also doesn't benefit from the same fast recovery times as Naruto, and he seems to put on the backburner the very real threat that she could die. In fact, she is seen coughing blood a month afterwards when spectating the Naruto versus Neji match, unconscious after having received medical treatment when Naruto managed to get the victory<sup>[9]</sup>. It's extremely careless to push someone about their mindset when they may not get a chance to reap the rewards of mental fortitude. Hinata doesn't know her limits as she hasn't given it her all before. After the second knockdown is when the fight *was* going to end but Naruto urges her on. Her only game plan was the gentle fist which has been negated by Neji's surgical attacks on her arms. There is no other plan or ounce of trickery to try, it's over.

Hinata came into this trying to find her mindset, her way of the Shinobi, as she has been paying close attention to Naruto - "Naruto! I've been watching ... I've watched you for years. I don't know what it is, but when I watch Naruto ... I feel a wellspring of courage bubbling up inside me. I feel like if I just do my best, then even I am worth something"<sup>[10]</sup>. Pulling all of her

teachings together for this moment, she is starting to cultivate mental toughness and the sides of her personality she wished she had. This fight is the start of a long and painful transformation but she found her answer, she can indeed change, the old her would've given up.

Unknowingly, her ability to change and deviate from what Neji thinks is an essential, immutable part of her being aggravates him and she is aware of his pain: "I can see it now ... that even more than me... it's you who are torn and suffering. Caught between the destinies of the main branch and the side branch of our clan"<sup>[11]</sup>. She has been able to parse that if the clan did break up he would lose everything, crushing his notions of destiny, of eternal servitude and of an "inner nature" that has a task assigned to it at birth and so forth. The sacrifice of his father would be for nothing as well. The fact she understands and is able to put aside everything to consider his feelings grates against the ideas of a main branch that cares nothing of the side branch and uses them as pawns. Have they changed? No. Never. He lashes out and makes one last dash to get her for good when the Jonin jump in to stop the match.

## Naruto and the Pervy Shaman

Moving outside of the preliminaries now, it's time to see the brief piece of training that Naruto underwent with Jiraiya.

I use the term shaman as Jiraiya fulfils many of the aspects of one, with Naruto as his fledgling student into the psychedelic realm. Obviously he isn't perfect, as he gawks at women, drinks and gambles but he does have a good heart and we come to learn further down in the series the degrees to which he will go to help the village. A shaman has many different interpretations but it tends to revolve around the idea of having access to



the world of spirits, other-worldly entities and being a guide through multiple realms.

Another function of the shaman is the ability to heal as one has a deep and intuitive understanding of the mind and body, thereby sensing irregularities in others; when Jiraiya started teaching Naruto he soon picked up on the fact that the seal placed on him by Orochimaru was hindering his ability to walk on water and was able to correct him. Immediately we see the difference as now Naruto can do it without much attention at all, a sign of balance.

Look at the difference in agency for the two main characters: that Sasuke's curse mark was immediately sealed away whereas Naruto had his seal by Orochimaru revoked and allowed the beast to come right up into purview, getting through to the next stage soon enough. In fairness, the nature of the two are different and they are at different stages of integration: Naruto has had around twelve years for his body to adapt to the tailed beast whereas Sasuke has only had his mark for a couple months and it's far more deleterious - taking over the body and brain with each use. Remember that the curse mark is essentially a group of Jugo's cells and some of Orochimaru's senjutsu chakra which rewrites Sasuke's DNA to gain the functionality of passively absorbing senjutsu chakra. Changing the DNA of too many cells at once can hamper the body's ability to repair and maintain critical systems, essentially killing him, so for now he has to allow the curse mark to propagate slowly. The only problem being, this is also the time Sasuke wants to use his mark the most. He feels time is against him to prove himself against opponents like Gaara, Naruto and finally Itachi. There is no time like the present and this desire to keep pace contrasts with the village hampering his development by introducing the seal. Naruto on the other hand has everything coming together and a teacher who is

showing him how to navigate this world. As we shall see shortly, Sasuke cannot handle the feeling that he is being left behind.

The next task after walking on water is to try some summonings. This "pre-training" (before he summons Gammabunta) is a type of cleansing, which people in shamanic ceremonies typically do so that they can communicate with themselves and other beings more clearly. Jiraiya explicitly wants Naruto to drain himself of all his standard chakra (a kind of chakra purging), which gives him a better chance of using "the red chakra". If I were to extend this idea possibly too far it would be that when Naruto was fighting all his clones to drain his energy, he was truly beating and berating himself, which corresponds to real-world ceremonies as people wade through trauma, feel sad, sick and light-headed before meeting an entity. Having an understanding of the threads which constitute the self allows one to radically change their mindset, and thus how they act in the world, opening up a new domain of how one Wills.

Naruto is still summoning Tadpoles as he isn't quite emotionally charged, certainly not at the level he was when he fought Haku and the Nine-Tails chakra seemed to react only during those high-intensity moments. Seeing the poor boy struggling to summon a frog Jiraiya decides to push him off a cliff, not because he's useless of course, just that a life or death situation can force a spiritual integration.

Now is the time to activate that primal energy and sure enough he starts to peer into the eerie mental labyrinths. Before he could only watch as the red chakra flowed through him and he neither knew nor cared for where and how it arose but now he sees the source of this energy and he will begin dialoguing with this demon. Naruto puts on his tough guy appearance and tries to remain calm in front of the fox, the one who's responsible for having him ostracised all these years, but before we can have a full therapy

session he is bequeathed a large amount of red chakra, a gift from the underworld "for making it this far"<sup>[12]</sup>. This release of energy facilitates the summoning of the almighty Chief Toad! This encounter is remarkable because the entity is truly surprised to see Naruto and has no idea how such a child is conversing with him, bombarding him with questions. Both start interrogating each other, which is similar to the recorded experiences in DMT trips, where the entity a person sees can be dumbfounded that they were able to meet, let alone converse, but before Naruto reaches the top of the cliff he has already passed out<sup>[13]</sup>, so they'll have to chat some other time.

## Good gourd, there's a sand spirit!!

You would've thought beating someone to the edges of their life would count as enough of a victory but for Gaara it's the same as if he was standing there untouched. Like a ghoul in the night he glides amongst the shadowy hospital corridors until he gets to Lee's room. This Gaara that watches over Lee isn't the calm and collected one we saw, as he's shaken with memories of aeons ago that have risen up to the surface after a long period of repression. Just as much as the sand breaks from his gourd so too do these memories spill over, slowly but surely his childhood is beckoning to be integrated into this caricature of an adult.

Lee was saved by his sensei for being precious to him, despite the fact he had "failed" which means he should be of no utility, which means he may as well not exist - the chain of reasoning found in suicidal people that are overly critical of the manner in which they live. Seeing Lee be saved and cherished for what he is, caused flashes of his mother to appear after Guy saved him from the sand. This type of care is, quintessentially, a mother's love.

There is probably no better psychologist to reference if you need a strong understanding of the symbolisms of the unconscious than Carl Jung and it didn't take much time until I gleaned sections closely tied to Gaara's particular dilemmas. In *Psychology and Alchemy*, part of the book illustrates a series of dreams had by some of his clients, with one centring on the role of parents. Jung notes that a childish consciousness is never by itself<sup>[14]</sup>, for it is by definition linked to the mother and father as survival is impossible without them. This passage just jumps out of the page as Gaara is forever tied to his mother as she lives and cares for him through the sand he carries. His father may not be there in the physical sense, but his dominion has never allowed him to blossom on his own, in fact it was his father who authorised uncountably many attempts to kill him as he mentions in the hospital.

Despite the range of different intentions, this has all but secured his total solitude and seclusion. Jung goes on to note that as years go by, the newly discovered world forces them to grow up, which leaves a wealth of unresolved psychological material behind. The subject becomes distant from it, which will include all the aspects of their personality that they had detached from as well. In time, when memories flood back, they cling and evoke the nostalgia of earlier times<sup>[14]</sup>. This harsh demeanour that he projects is the boundary between him and his past, but all the other candidates thought of him as the strongest because he assumed the role of adult the quickest. Over time however other people will catch up and they will have a wealth of different experiences, self-knowledge and self-worth that Gaara doesn't.

In a weird way, he is attacking himself through Lee as he strives to bury this content, the part of his life that has caused him pain, trying to shove it all back into the unconscious. Just as he gets the chance he's stopped by Naruto and Shikamaru who question him. They surmise that he wants to kill Lee,

unsurprisingly, but conversation begins to turn toward his birth, and it's sad to see how he has rendered the entirety of his childhood in such darkness. Naruto's rattled as he can't believe the similarity, thanks to Iruka he didn't have to stare into the abyss for too long but he'll never forget what that isolation felt like. When Shikamaru says "what kind of parent does a thing like that [sealing Shukaku within a newborn]? What twisted love"<sup>[15]</sup> it must also sting for Naruto as he hasn't spoken to his father, whoever he is, and I presume he has so many questions about his own circumstances. All he knows at the moment is that he carries around a demon which was sealed after it attacked the village and killed his parents.

Gaara is an embodiment of what you can become when you lose faith in family, siblings, and village. When he says "My father tried to destroy me more times than I can count"<sup>[16]</sup> it reminds me of when Zabuza said - "When you hover between life and death so many times it doesn't faze you, then you may be called a ninja"<sup>[17]</sup>. In truth it's correct to say you may be called a demon.

He explains that the demon was sealed inside a tea-kettle<sup>[18]</sup>, which is directly inspired from the stories of *Bunbuku Chagama*, a Japanese folktale about a Tanuki (raccoon dog) on whom Shukaku is based off of. There are two popular interpretations/translations, the first being that a Priest by the name of Shukaku (who was a Tanuki himself) would pour tea for the monks in the monastery, and the teapot had an inexhaustible amount of hot water - a thousand priests could be served tea, and it was said this was due to the eight virtues it held<sup>[19]</sup>.

The second is a British interpretation<sup>[20]</sup> where the tea-kettle is a Tanuki called Bunbuku. He gets picked up from a second-hand store and taken to live with a monk. Just as he falls asleep the Tanuki springs its tail and stretches its legs, to which three other people in the home spot him! They

shriek, waking up the monk. When he puts it on the stove, sure enough the kettle cries “Hot, hot!” before jumping off. One of them grabbed a stick and started hitting it, but all they got were metal clangs. Just as the monk was debating on what to do, a tinsman came to the door and happily bought the kettle for a few coppers. Soon enough the same appearance of tails and legs popped out, with a similar reaction ... but Bunbuku says to not be frightened, as he brings good luck to any good retainer<sup>[21]</sup>. He goes on to say that he doesn’t like being beaten and just wants the same ol’ things that anybody does - good food, good wine and so on. The two started going round the country performing, and with his shapeshifting abilities he soon wooed the nation, with the tinsman retiring a wealthy man. In the end the tea-kettle was brought back to Morinji Temple and lived out its days as a precious treasure. The story highlights some of the character dynamics that Gaara has, for his character is being tested and scrutinised, but all he really wants is what any normal person desires.

In the darkness, this stage is beginning to feel like an eternity so Gaara tries to veer from hope and live without the prayers that someone like the tinsman will come and save him. I have mentioned in earlier sections that the Kitsune were known for shape shifting and chaotic naughtiness but Tanuki are also Yokai with the same transforming ability. Both creatures were feared and scalded for being the root cause of bad luck, disease, insanity - anything malign essentially. In 702 CE, in Section VII of the Zokutō Ritsu (賊盜律 Laws Concerning Robbers), the emperor at the time, Emperor Mommu, had to explicitly stop people from smoking their burrows because people were that eager to see them dead. The two were so commonly demonised, that the word Kori(狐狸) came into use, which is the combined Kanji of kitsune(狐) and tanuki(狸) - it isn’t just a coincidence that these two were hated but the result of a long held disdain...

What's more, it was believed people could be possessed by either a Kitsune or Tanuki; in the case of Tanuki possession (Tanuki-tsuki), the victim is said to overeat until their belly swells, which will cause death unless exorcised<sup>[22]</sup>. The emergence of morbid addictions exemplifies itself in Gaara, where he has to kill to show that he exists, once thought as a token of his self-interest, could be the result of deep-seeded Tanuki possession. Contrastingly, he may not be possessed at all but because the village has shown him no love whatsoever he uses this rage to kill in the image of what possession would look like, but caused by the villages' coldness.

The spirits that these two harbour would be further developed in Shippuden into nine tailed beasts, of whom a person that keeps one or more inside of themselves known as a "Jinchuriki", translating to "Power of human sacrifice". It's close to the idea of *jintsuriki* which is "God-reaching power", which is self-evidently the case in terms of what it affords the bearer, as the scale of the first fight between them was beyond anything we'd seen previously - but it also hints at the fact that human sacrifice, of oneself and not others I hope, leads to strength. Gaara has chosen to interpret it in the most malign way, offering up offers for his ambition, but in the end he was the ultimate sacrifice.

Additionally, this was around the time we got introduced to the art of summoning as well, called *Kuchiyose*, meaning "drawing in to speak", which is in reference to the idea of possession with certain Yokai. Naruto used it to collaborate with Gammabunta, and he served not just as the medium from the spiritual realm to the physical, but as an extension of what he does with other people, which is to talk with them and through dialogue avoid some of the more dire straits that Gaara is in.

## 5

# Naruto vs Neji : Death by a thousand pokes

They square up and Neji is feeling quite chipper seeing as he has just beaten the heir to the Hyūga, proving his own abilities and taking out some of his anger toward the main household. That she tried to go against her nature of being weak-willed and a coward, but this is meant to be something fundamental that cannot change, which is why he can coin terms like “elite and failure”<sup>[1]</sup>. But in equal measure we must accept Hinata as possessing the fundamental quality to become heir, as she was born to the leader of the clan, something which also cannot change. In fact, if we do some digging into what her name actually means, it should be self-evident that she’s right for the job!

The name “Hyūga” translates to “place in the sun”/“toward the sun” which I believe is used as a designation for the Japanese people themselves since the Kanji for Japan (日本) approximates to “sun origin” - making them the descendents of it. To be clear, the affiliation is with the Shinto Sun Goddess Amaterasu, who’s bloodline was said to have eventually led to the birth of Japan’s first emperor, Emperor Jimmu<sup>[2]</sup>; this has connotations with the Hyūga having an ancestral lineage that began with Hamura Otsutsuki, who is a member of the “Gods” in this anime. Hinata’s first name can be translated as “toward the sun”, which is one translation of the word “Hyūga” as well. They are equivalent for the reason that she is nothing other than the Clan Identity, and having such a name tries to represent her as the embodiment of her ancestry - at least in theory. As we see that whilst her *name* represents the complete alignment with her people, it’s actually Neji



that could do a better job, which could be a jab at the accuracy and ability to name somebody and expect their nature to follow that name/role<sup>1</sup>.

This is a clan obsessed with roles, rituals and the like and take them as some kind of law of reality, as they have existed almost as long as the Byakugan itself. The reason for this severity probably has to do with their name, as Amaterasu is also the leader of Takamagahara, the Shinto equivalent of heaven, thus being derived from her implies they inherit her divine authority. Well, one branch of the clan does whilst the rest have to live under a different set of rules, as Lee says during Neji's match with Hinata: "The first generation of the Hyūga clan made all sorts of rules and decrees that favoured the main branch of the family, in order to preserve the family line and retain the purity of their blood"<sup>[3]</sup>.

## The ties between brethren

The notoriously strict and dogmatic way of the Hyūga has not been universal throughout history when we look to actual Japanese clans; during the Heian period for example, it was noted that such a main and branch distinction existed, but the heir of the clan would keep a minimal right over the affairs of his brothers and sisters<sup>[4]</sup>. In clans that became bilateral, by which a side branch would inherit the same governance power as the former main household, there was usually peaceful recognition of shared lineage, rather than constant infighting<sup>[4]</sup>.

Zooming in on one of the main Houses extant in the Heian, namely the Kusakabe of Hyūga, we see a peaceful transition of power even outside of the usual procedure of primogeniture. This is where the eldest child ordinarily becomes the inheritor of the entire estate, but in one case the

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<sup>1</sup> The rectification of names is a Confucian idea that social categories can be clearly defined and once so, harmony should result.

second-born son was chosen for headship, out of his display of greater competence<sup>[5]</sup>. Thus the position of heir could be said to be one of choice, not of birth. How this serves as one of the rebuttals to Neji's nihilism is that some of the aspects of fate in which he ardently believes to be concrete may be more malleable than he thought.

Although I try to paint an idyllic picture, things began to worsen during the advent of the Kamakura period. Two principal reasons were the Mongol invasions(1274 & 1281) and the beginnings of the Shogunate governmental structure<sup>[6]</sup>. They passed laws over every clan in hopes of constructing a more well-prepared nation to rebuff the invaders<sup>[7]</sup>, but a consequence of this was the ramped up tensions within families. The very same House I referenced for its exemplary conduct became rife with internal issues<sup>[8]</sup>, with the clan partitioning into separate vassals soon after.

Societally, things never really returned to the lucidity and relative peacefulness of the Heian until the Edo, and the Shogunate continued to pass draconian legislation. One pertinent example being the four main social classes of Samurai, Farmer, Artisan and Merchant being locked in, and social mobility getting outright banned<sup>[9]</sup> - exemplifying Neji's current woes. What's more, there is another example which speaks to the stultification *between* classes as well, highlighted in the book *Tour of Duty: Samurai, Military Service in Edo, and the Culture of Early Modern Japan*. After the decisive win of Tokugawa Ieyasu at the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, many of the most powerful Daimyo thought it best to offer close kin to the Shogun as guarantees of good behaviour<sup>[10]</sup>, and thus began a kind of hostage system. Initially founded on the goodwill between all parties, by 1635 it became compulsory.

Cases like these completely remove the gesture and place it in the realm of any other protocol, with grace and manners fading with each passing

swiftness of altruism into law. Applying this to Neji, what could've been a clan of brotherhood has been scrapped and the side branch *must* look after the head family, and the curse mark he has makes this so.

That mark on his forehead is probably the most harrowing and immoral of all the different variants of prohibitive markings we've seen from Sasuke's, to Sai's mark on the tongue and so on. It can be used whenever the elders deem it necessary, and due to it not being self-referential he can only live in fear, hoping they possess mercy. Sasuke's mark could act up if he allows the energy to course through him, and Sai's mark will only act up if he tries to speak of Danzo, yet there is nothing beyond a single hand sign that would prevent his brain from being assaulted. Despite it being almost acausal, he knows that outside of the *particular* reason, it will always be because he was born as a branch family member.

Kishimoto's inspiration for the mark I believe is from the golden headband that was placed on Sun Wukong<sup>[11]</sup>, a central character in the book *Journey to the West*, where he accompanies a monk called Tripitaka to retrieve the sacred Buddhist texts in hopes of enlightenment. The headband was used as a method of controlling him and containing his outbursts. They were also used more generally to contain any monster, such that they could be converted and persuaded to become a fellow disciple<sup>[11]</sup>.

By the end of the book the headband actually dissolves as Sun Wukong had found inner peace, freedom and learnt self-control, as Guan Yin's original purpose for handing them to Tripitaka was for anybody to transcend their monkey-minded addictions; however, the way the Head Family of the Hyūga uses them is for a *closed* loop of subjugation. Freedom would mean a separation from their responsibilities, and thus they have sneakily managed to equate human freedom as being a monstrous assertion of rebellion against their values.

This is why Neji makes the point to Naruto that not just anyone can become Hokage, as everyone bears circumstances which narrow their fate to a single trajectory. Just how many people have ever had the chance, despite all their hard work and determination<sup>[12]</sup>? Especially Naruto, as he's seen as the emblematic figure of failure: he gets the worst grades in class, he constantly gets into trouble and hasn't shown many of the attributes of a good Hokage.

Whilst Neji makes some good points, Naruto rebukes it in his standard boisterous fashion and doesn't care what he thinks - he'll find a way! He launches a fresh set of shadow clones after him<sup>[13]</sup>, but they're all summarily negated by his Palm Rotation and before he can catch a breath Neji opens up the stance for the 64-palms, forcefully putting his chakra network into shutdown. This is peculiar, as we wouldn't expect a side-branch member to have learnt such things - a technique which is only taught between the clan leader and the heir<sup>[14]</sup>.

Looking at the history of these techniques also reveals a similar pattern of secrecy, as they come from the aptly named school of *Neijia* - based on practices seen in the Daoist temples of the Wudang Mountains<sup>[15]</sup>. Its primary focus is for the individual to master their own body, and control their weight and inflection whenever they perform a technique<sup>[15]</sup>, with Neji illustrating his mastery of such things perfectly as he can emit chakra from any point in the body. What's more, their classic move of "pushing hands" has also been inverted by Kishimoto to "Gentle Fist".

The origins of the word *Neijia* is contentious, and comes from the words *Nei*, for internal, and *Jia*, for school, house, home - but it's unclear in what sense the original combination was intended. There are schools of martial arts, but as one theory suggests: "Another proposed etymology for the terms "neijia" and "wajia" is that some martial arts were taught exclusively

to those inside one's family, whereas instruction in other martial arts, such as Changquan, was available to all, i.e. those outside one's family"<sup>[16]</sup>. Thus this ties in with his uncle's astonishment.

## The Monkey King

Now we can go a little more in depth into the book that has been highly influential in *Naruto*, with some of the battles influencing this match as you shall see. The first chapter sets the stage for his journey, as he has spent around three-hundred years living a content albeit boring life - and though he can live for hundreds more he will eventually die... is this all there is? His reflection leads to a desire for immortality, and he travels for a decade in search of an immortal who can teach him. Eventually, he meets a man called Subodhi who agrees to have him learn amongst his students. He asks for his name, but Sun as yet has no name, no parents - he just remembers that one day he hatched from an egg. Upon hearing this, he is given the moniker "Sun Wukong": Sun-who-has-awoken-to-emptiness<sup>[17]</sup>. Poetic, and also reminiscent of the initial conditions of another protagonist<sub>2</sub>.

Sun is delighted with his new name, and trains diligently until the master asks in what direction he would like to take his tutelage now - in terms of learning from a particular Taoist school. Sun's goal was always immortality, and despite all the offerings of myriad other denominations, if the teachings aren't relevant he refuses to dedicate himself. The other students are appalled at his rudeness, but both Subodhi and Sun knew this was a test to see if he could stick to his guns on what brought him here, and he's signalled to come back at midnight for teachings in the Way.

But despite being blessed with sacred knowledge, he continues to play the class clown and redirects his prowess into comical endeavours<sup>[18]</sup>. Subodhi

caught wind of this and was outraged at the use of his gifts and sent him back to Water-Curtain cave, the Land of Monkeys.

Upon returning, he sees that a demon had terrorised his people and chases after him - this is where we see his ability to take his hairs, chew a few of them in his mouth, spit them out and yell “change!” to spawn additional monkeys which has a functional similarity to the shadow-clone jutsu, though this doesn’t seem to be the main inspiration<sup>[19]</sup>, it’s probably closer to Deidara’s ability.

To celebrate his victory, they have a banquet where he spills the fact that he had been taught under Subodhi, something he promised not to do. He went against his word, and “A monkey stands and falls by his word”<sup>[20]</sup> we thought. It seems this identity of his is slipping the more he enters into hedonic waters. He goes on to steal weapons from other lands<sub>3</sub>, and even into heaven to take their elixir, wine and peaches.

Word of his misdeeds gets to the Jade Emperor of heaven, and the organised assault just about manages to pin down Monkey. But due to his immortality being supplemented by the Heavenly consumables, ordinary swords and strikes won’t suffice. It is Laozi (the man who formulated Taoism) that says he should be cooked in the brazier of eight trigrams to weaken him enough to be slain<sup>[21]</sup>; this treatment corresponds to how Neji tries to beat Naruto by using said jutsu to weaken him enough for the finishing blow - if he isn’t dead already. Smoke billowed inside the cauldron leaving his eyes red and inflamed, but just as the heat made Monkey stronger it also caused Naruto to dig deeper and use the power of the fox, his eyes flaring red as well<sub>3</sub>.

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<sup>2</sup> One of the weapons Sun Wukong gets is the iron-pillar, capable of changing form, which is the transformation of Monkey King Enma that Hiruzen uses.

<sup>3</sup> It’s a funny coincidence that both the fox and the monkey, whilst we think are mythically diffuse, have a convergent symbology in Chinese myth for Buddhist religious life and asceticism<sup>[22]</sup>.

Some time later, Tripitaka is selected to go on the pilgrimage which was set to last around three years<sup>[23]</sup>, which is coincidentally the same amount of time that Naruto would take studying under Jiraiya. Over the course of his journey he will meet many friends and foes, and he'd learn the secret to surmounting each obstacle would be to almost always try and reason/befriend them, as he'll see they're on the same path.

The first major example is when he's fighting a rowdy character called Pigsy who'd wasted all his youth doing pointless activities, and like Sun would encounter the teachings of an immortal before causing calamity; despite his best efforts for upwards reincarnation, he'd ended up being reborn as a hog<sup>[24]</sup>. During their fight Pigsy says Guan Yin persuaded him to convert to Buddhism from Taoism to aid in the scripture seeking to the West. That's when they realise they have the same goal, and join back up with Tripitaka to head out. In the very next chapter, the same theme shows itself, as the three of them need to cross the river - but there's a horrible monster that's making things difficult... Not to worry, says Sun, who recommends using force to *get* him to take Tripitaka across the river, and then they'll deal with him later<sup>[25]</sup>. All he needs to realise is if he just tells his "enemies" the pilgrimage he's on, then they would be familiar with the orders of Guan Yin and know to aid the monk. They fought the beast in the same way three times before they tried something new, and once they had said their mission the monster acquiesced.

*Journey to the West* sets a blueprint for the style of confrontation, manner of villainy and resolve in *Naruto*, but this series takes it to another level. Often there are demons that Sun will have to fight and there are plenty that don't see a version of TnJ - but this is the exception in *Naruto*. In addition there is also the introduction of a type of villain that forms their own ideas of good and evil, which leads to conflict. The reason for this is the introduction of Humanism in tandem with the divine, which shows the consequences of

heightened human agency to postulate on Good and Evil, on Destiny and the way of things. Naruto wants to find an analogue to the grace of heaven by using the bonds that exist between people as they join his path for a collaborative Shinobi creed.

Part of his answer to Neji is that this power can serve to change the destiny of people despite their fate. Iruka freed Naruto from being someone who was the jinchuriki *and* alone, with the latter being what really crushed his spirits. By uniting with others you can steer your flight path away from terrible outcomes, and even now we see a small example. When Naruto was on his way to the final rounds, he was feeling anxious and inadequate after that run-in with Gaara at the hospital. But on his way there he bumps into Hinata, and her surreptitious words actually resonate with him, rekindling the vigour he normally has. Neji was able to sense this with his Byakugan, when he tried to play fortune-teller once again: “He has absolute faith in himself, as if he hasn’t got a single doubt”<sup>[26]</sup>. Kishimoto has this be one of the crucial parts of the puzzle, that the encouragement we get from those around us inspires us to Will, to try.

## Acceptance of Taoism

The contentious point of Neji’s arguments rests with his ability to use the techniques which his destiny wasn’t meant to allow him access, and the history of things like the Eight-Trigrams reflects his interpretations of reality. Based on the use of Yin-Yang hexagrams and trigrams in a Book called the *I Ching* (or *Yijing*), it uses geometric displays to represent concepts like heaven, earth, water, fire and so forth. People used them to explain “quintessential thingness” as described by the dynamics of yin and yang<sup>[27]</sup>.



The doctrine of strict interpretation lasted for a while until one commentary on the *I Ching* by a young man called Wang Bi(226–249) called for a more flexible reading, and to interpret each as a field of action, an arena, whereby different forces and players can interact<sup>[28]</sup>. As per the *Stanford Encyclopaedia* entry on the *I Ching*, it mentions that a hexagram symbolises a web of relations that governs the possible actions and interactions between players, and what they can do to advance their interests<sup>[28]</sup>.

Neji has too strict an interpretation of roles, which maps to the traditional way of seeing Hexagrams as perfect representations of things, but hopefully he can grasp what Wang Bi illustrates: that it's most important if we recognise these as dynamic and incorporate them into our own Way. One of the great Chinese sages, Laozi, saw that such strictness would precipitate future chaos, grinding against the unfurling of the self, leading to rigidity and thus a kind of death, citing that the tree with the hardest wood will be cut down<sup>[29]</sup>.

Wang Bi used the principles of Taoism to challenge the consequences of governmental Confucianism, and its ability to lock people into rituals which were no longer meaningful. Just as one of the foundational rules of the Way is its transcendental nature and ability to elude categorisation, the same is true for the Path of any given individual. To be clear, he didn't reject Confucian virtues and practices outright, but noted that one has to back them up with his or her own thoughts and feelings, otherwise they are "shells of virtue"<sup>[30]</sup>, and he uses the *Analects* itself to show that merely behaving morally is insufficient.

## The birdcage creaks open

All in all though, it's very easy for me to say that Neji needs to break out of this performative allegiance to the main branch, as even tiptoeing along that direction can get him punished. When he was young and still had the bandages from the curse mark ritual, he was sitting watching Hinata and Hiashi train, and as his father went to strike he saw the horror that awaited him. I think the reason Hiashi did this was to show his son the true nature of these people, and that Neji had been all smiles when he accepted his fate<sup>[31]</sup>, but he wanted him to know there was more to life than that. As a father it probably angered him to see the genius of the clan relegated in such a way.

Neji has had to swallow the loss that the main household inflicted whilst also trying to find it in himself to serve, hence why he adopted the concept of destiny, as it allowed him to move forward by expressing grief whilst abiding by his duties. But Naruto as yet doesn't see the underlying reason for his anger, his belligerent scrutiny of others, as he's still the enemy - "you mocked Hinata... calling her a failure and claiming you could see her fate... 'Main branch', 'Side branch' ... I don't know anything about that stuff, but I could never forgive a jerk who goes around calling people failures!"<sup>[32]</sup>.

Thus begins the Naruto-style of psychotherapy, as he gets the client to open up and reveal what really hangs on their mind. He gets Neji to talk about "the hateful legacy"<sup>[33]</sup> of the Hyūga and the specific details of the curse mark on his forehead. It is the symbol of a bird locked in its cage, "proof that some people are bound to destinies from which they cannot escape"<sup>[34]</sup>.

His father was the one who informed him that his destiny would be to protect Lady Hinata<sup>[35]</sup>, "To serve and shield the main branch... and never disobey them and to eternally protect the Byakugan, the bloodline trait of the Hyūga clan"<sup>[36]</sup>. But then the incident occurred, in which his father was murdered by the main branch. He believes it was done in order to spare the

village from war, and recounts the story of the Cloud ninja coming into the village to sign a peace agreement. Every clan was there, except one. The Hyūga didn't attend because it was Lady Hinata's third birthday<sup>[37]</sup>. To really get across how massive a sucker punch this is, the Hyūga chose their own daughter's birthday over the celebration of peace for *both villages*, implying that their daughter's happiness is worth more than the treaty itself and the lives of those lost in war.

Naruto listens to his entire story and never interrupts him, trying to take in this wealth of history alongside Neji's own troubles. He asks questions that seem to come from the heart and shares his frustration<sup>[38]</sup>. I'm sure this attentiveness was in part due to his own childhood of just wanting someone to listen to him, and he doesn't allow his previous bouts of anger and annoyance at Neji get in the way of empathising with him.

This kind of approach seems inspired by the methods of renowned American psychologist Carl Rogers, whose psychotherapeutic advice was centred on providing relationships with his clients that could give them the capacity for personal development to occur<sup>[39]</sup>. Naruto doesn't politely say "Oh, how terrible" to try and cover his discomfort, but actually repeats back what he hears<sup>[40]</sup>, and even pokes and prods when he feels that Neji makes bizarre conclusions<sup>[41]</sup>. As Rogers mentions, the more genuine he can be in the relationship that he cultivates, the more fruitful it will be. But this involves having to be aware of one's own feelings so that you can escape the presentation of a facade and voice your own thoughts<sup>[42]</sup>. He explicitly uses the word *reality* when talking about where he wants to steer the conversation, and says establishing that is a necessary first condition to getting better. How many times have we seen Neji say "this is reality"<sup>[43]</sup> or something to that effect, since he's not only trying to serve his clan but resolve the tension in his heart. He assures all his opponents that he's got it all figured out, but I think even his eyes have missed something.

He has always seen the power that someone has as being directly correlated to their blood, their tutors, their village. But whilst that *makes* someone strong, it doesn't answer *why* they want to become strong in the first place. Haku had incredible genetic gifts, a master tutor in Zabuza but only by having love as the kindling to become a Shinobi did it materialise. It is a force that keeps cropping up in both the first series and Shippuden, so forgive me for bouncing around a little bit. For Lee, his goal of being a splendid ninja using just Taijutsu is exemplified in Guy at the end of the series, and do we remember what the self-rule was for opening the Eighth Gate? "To protect something precious enough to give your life for"<sup>[44]</sup>. Neji's father sacrificed himself for this very reason, for the *love* he had for his family, not out of a compulsion of his or out of the duty befitting a branch member.

After the match, his uncle walks in thinking it's finally the right time to tell Neji about that day<sup>[45]</sup>. He stresses that he was fully prepared to die in order to stop another potential war, but one of the elders said Hizashi's body should be used as the sacrifice, as "that is why we have the cadet branch"<sup>[46]</sup> - which was a retort from his father! He says that one must possess a heart of iron as it comes with the responsibilities of being the head of the household, but I don't remember treating people as tools as part of the job description. It also presumes Hizashi couldn't understand what's going on, but he'd already made up his mind, because he finally gets to leave this insane tradition behind. He knows had he been spared, it wouldn't have been because he was precious, but merely because a different solution had been selected.

Ordinarily, a branch family member is only loved on the condition they are obedient, silent and expedient, and the elders would be right to suspect that people would abdicate if allowed free reign, because they are blind to the true binding agent. "Please convey to Neji [...] that I freely chose to die... in

order to protect Neji, my siblings, the clan and the entire village”<sup>[47]</sup>. For Gaara, when he could understand love, he could comprehend being one with the Sand and take on the responsibility of being its Kazekage. Once Neji had understood the priority it played, he would no longer hold hatred in his heart, and in the end the distinction between head and branch had ceased<sup>[48]</sup>.

With everything that has happened, his uncle relays his father’s wishes not as the head of the main branch, but as Hizashi’s older brother. Now it seems that long-standing scars may finally come to heal: "Father ... I still can't be entirely certain whether people's fates simply coast along like the clouds in the sky or if each person can choose his own path to follow. But when you decide to follow your own path, you can strive to achieve your own dreams. And in my match today, I finally learned that people with dreams are the ones who are truly strong. To become stronger right now, I want to become so strong I will never lose to anyone again. Father... there are so many birds in the sky today ...flying free”<sup>[49]</sup>.

## Hypocrisy at work?

This fight had a sizable number of people dislike the message at the end of this match, despite resonating with Naruto’s philosophy in previous arcs. One reason being is that he used the Nine-Tails, a power which he cannot change, to achieve victory whilst lecturing on “this destiny stuff”. In fairness, Naruto doesn’t challenge his points about Hokage, or of people being born with things they cannot control, he has a much larger problem with the conclusions that Neji draws on himself and inflicts on others. Moreover, what seems to happen during their penultimate strike is that their innate gifts cancel each other out, with the only thing that sets them apart being that one chooses to believe it is foretold, standing magnanimously, whilst the other starts digging hoping he can win. That is

the conviction that saw him edge past Neji. The reason he doesn't feel empowered to do the same is because Neji's accomplishments are always clouded by the dominion of the main household, as a victory doesn't feel great when it's hard to believe it's yours. Nevertheless, the two of them stand as an admixture of other people's decisions and their own agency. Naruto doesn't represent freedom in its entirety, and neither does Neji for fate, but viewers hope that this fight will have all the answers in regards to these categories, when the entire series is an answer to our struggling protagonists.

The accusations of hypocrisy seem to mount against Naruto when he enters Shippuden, as now he has been labelled the reincarnation of Ashura. His interaction with the divine is presumed to exempt him from the problems which plague ordinary people, and him and Sasuke being "the children of destiny" seems to extol Neji's language as fundamental. What this had attempted to show was that no matter the degree to which your past has been preordained, you can still make meaningful changes to your life by using what freedom you have. The Path is narrow but never closed.

Additionally, the fact he is a reincarnate is separate from Hagoromo's bestowal of power, as all the term refers to is the perennial fight between darkness and light, negation and union and so forth. Naruto was the first Shinobi to ever resolve it because he accepted his destiny as not being solely Ashura's<sup>[50]</sup>, and worked to understand Sasuke, with his words becoming a way of breaking that curse.

## 6

# Sasuke vs Gaara, then Naruto vs Gaara

The fight we and the spectators were being teased with for so long has begun! What I noticed initially was that Gaara had to wait an equally long amount of time just as he did in the preliminaries, and the fact there was a high chance he wouldn't even get to fight Sasuke should've made him more erratic than before. But here he was calm, patient and unwavering in his assurance that Sasuke would show up<sup>[1]</sup>. Why? He said it himself, they're made of the same darkness and the same need to prove themselves.

Their brief encounter in the mountains confirmed this, as he wasn't checking Sasuke to gain some kind of competitive advantage, he wanted to see if he was a man looking to find and affirm his purpose: "What is your motive? Why do you seek strength?"<sup>[2]</sup>. Sasuke tries to rebuff him and keep up the mysterious tough-guy persona, but their stare down reveals everything he wanted to know: "You've got eyes just like mine. Eyes full and spilling over with hatred and intent to kill... you're like me"<sup>[3]</sup>. Gaara goes on to say he recognises the loneliness in Sasuke's eyes as they have a vengeance in them to see all who caused him pain to die - it cuts to Itachi and he's surprised Gaara could know all this.

Kakashi however isn't as impressed: "I don't know how you think you know all about Sasuke, but you shouldn't talk like you've seen him through entirely"<sup>[4]</sup>. I don't know whether Kakashi is truly ignorant of his nature or presumes Sasuke knows better, but every single one of Gaara's comments are on point both for the first season and Shippuden, as ideologically they're

in the same position just at different times. "A battle is a gamble, where one pits one's existence against another's [...] where only the victor gets to savour the worth of his existence. Uchiha. I know, you actually desire it too ... deep inside your heart, you want to confirm the worth of your existence. You're wondering 'Am I really as strong as I thought?'"<sup>[5]</sup>. It reminds me of when Sasuke was standing in line at the Chuunin preliminaries when he said he couldn't care less about passing, what matters is whether he can beat the strongest.

This section will mark a change in Sasuke's relationship to evil, as he'll be facing its incarnation head on in a moment. He is only just beginning to rely solely on hatred to kill; he has actually used the bonds he has with friends and teammates to spur him to act, like when he threw himself in front of Naruto to stop Haku's needles or when he defended Sakura in the Forest of Death.

Our resolute psychopath steps onto the stage ready to kill, but the theatrical performance is beginning to get unstable - "Please ... don't be so angry ... mother"<sup>[6]</sup>. The reason this outburst emerges is because he had failed to offer a sacrifice in the last ritual, the "addiction" for taking the lives of others is seen as an offering much like the Aztecs used to sacrifice people, sometimes in their thousands, to please their Gods. He has been outside of his mother's protection and feels her value since being vulnerable in her absence. If he doesn't sacrifice someone soon, will his mother cease to protect him? This is why this offering is all the more important, as he doesn't believe in the unconditional love of his mother just yet - he believes it exists only on a sacrificial basis. In truth, he made an offering when those two guys approached him in the tunnel to the arena, but this sacrifice was offering "bad blood"<sup>[7]</sup> as he later says himself. It looks now to be an act of desperation rather than one of revelling in murder.



Someone that doesn't see Gaara's weakness however, is Naruto. When he listened to him at the hospital, the talk of "my purpose lies in the killing of others" caused him to truly believe that Gaara was an entity that existed purely for his own benefit. Because Naruto believes Kurama's strength is his own, he presumes that the demon of Shukaku is wielded by Gaara's Will also; moreover, he strongly believes in the power of one's mindset so seeing this conviction resonated with him, as by his own criteria this must equate to serious power. He didn't believe in the strength of Neji and other opponents as they gave off the impression that their philosophy and actions differed - hence why he cheered for Hinata. Here however he is terrified for Sasuke and actually wants the match to get called off: "He's completely different from the rest of us! He's not normal!"<sup>[8]</sup>.

But Sasuke doesn't intend to make this a dog-fight, as he's been thoroughly briefed on the demon's abilities based on what Kakashi saw against Lee. The speed that Sasuke employs is practically equal to his and we move past the sand-armour stage toward the next level of defence: a completely encompassing sand sphere that reacts to any assault autonomously; because it's from all sides Gaara doesn't have to concern himself with watching the match and can safely perform his ritual of pulling the Shukaku into form.

Many people note that the fight between him and Sasuke isn't as explosive and flashy as the one versus Lee but this is because of their relative styles. Sasuke has the Chidori which is a calculated, precise jab compared to Lee's explosive, high-pace Taijutsu. Also, as soon as Gaara noted he was fast "just like that other one"<sup>[9]</sup> he didn't want to get smashed in mid-air again so opted for the absolute defence. Lastly, he isn't in the mental state to risk another close-combat fight so withdraws quickly. One of the axioms that defines his mental stability is being able to use the Shukaku as a means of killing people when he consciously cannot - he doesn't care if he falls asleep as long as those sacrifices go to his mother, fulfilling his purpose in one way

or another. He freely succumbs to the powers that be which is interesting as he said in the hospital "*my existence lies in the killing of others*" but really we know that he is willing to dissolve himself if it means victory, until he is just the demon in the end<sup>[10]</sup>. Gaara as we come to know had many painful experiences as a child and the more he interacts with people, as the Chuunin exams naturally progress, the more he will be reliving those moments. For all these reasons, he goes for the transformation much earlier than anticipated which goes against the Sand's plan of a coordinated ambush against the Leaf.

This moment is also a perfect time for Sasuke to prepare his new technique as well, and boy does it pack a punch, literally. He ducks and dives, swerving through all the defences and breaks right through the psyche causing *the* first bloodshed that Gaara has experienced. I wouldn't say the first injury as Gaara got beaten up against Lee, but here this illusive substance called blood that he could never quite understand has spilled out. His body has never really been injured and I'm sure the body's response is poor, hyperactive as it's working to find out what the hell happened.

Gaara gets carried out of the arena by Temari but as soon as he wakes up he hits her to one side knocking her out: "Just hurry up and get out of here! You're in the way"<sup>[11]</sup>. This uncompromising self-interest is how Sasuke would think coming into Shippuden around the time he fights Danzo and kills him, sacrificing his own team members to affirm his purpose. "You who are strong ... who are called Uchiha ... who have friends... and have a purpose just like me. By killing you I'll erase all of that and then I will truly exist and I can feel alive!"<sup>[12]</sup>. Sounds tough, but this is actually the more desperate purpose.

I look at Gaara's metamorphoses as a caustic and painful one as whenever it intensifies he struggles to stay awake like it wants to dominate his entire

mind, lurching forth and manifesting across his right-side. Already he's superhuman with insane speed, strength, resilience and Sasuke is starting to feel the pressure. Maybe this is the way forward. But what he isn't seeing is each moment Gaara's sanity wanes with heavy flashbacks.

He begins to taunt Sasuke, mocking him for being scared: "Well, what's the matter ?! Are you afraid of me? Have both your hatred and intent to kill wavered because of your fear? Is this the pitiful extent of your existence?"<sup>[13]</sup>. Itachi probably would've thought this was great for Sasuke seeing as he wanted him to maximise this power, and speaking of which, his image floats up and ignites his own trauma: "I was left alive ... intentionally, all by myself ... For what reason? No, I know the reason. He left me alive so he wouldn't be tormented by the guilt of annihilating the entire clan. Itachi chose me as his avenger, as the one who will eventually destroy him!"<sup>[14]</sup>. They enter a cycle whereby Sasuke gets taunted and loads up the Chidori, Gaara revels in having been stung and eggs him on again like a true masochist.

He grows another "sand limb" and ups the speed and ferocity of his attacks, smashing Sasuke into a tree. "Your hatred will never match mine, do you understand me"<sup>[15]</sup>. Loneliness isn't the only reason he talks like this, as he was abandoned, threatened with death and had every thread of love ripped away from him; thus he berates people that can live their life without the barrage of threats against it. They don't respect the miracle of existence enough as they have never had to justify it. He hates their naivety and has built up a vengeance against all the people that bludgeoned him with solitude, giving him the intent to kill. He explains that by making this his existence, in any battle to the death he will overcome his opponent for he is that very incarnation. It mirrors what Sasuke felt when he used the curse mark for the first time. To keep pace, he lets himself use it so he has the chakra necessary to fire off a third Chidori, but that same senjutsu chakra is

the only thing keeping him alive now, so he can't recede the mark otherwise he'll die. He too is becoming dependent on hate.

## My demon would kick your demon's ass!

Naruto and Sakura fortuitously jump in and Sakura immediately notices the curse mark: "I thought Kakashi sensei said this was nothing to worry about"<sup>[16]</sup>. He's trying to have the best of both worlds by using the curse mark and having Kakashi's tutelage, sticking with the Leaf and Team 7 whilst also plotting revenge against Itachi. Soon an ultimatum will be forced upon him and he'll scrap all these difficult "tightrope" social relations. Kakashi said he wouldn't train him if he used the curse mark in battle and that "you'll never beat Itachi"<sup>[17]</sup> fighting this way. In truth, after the Chidori and the basics of the Sharingan have been taught, Orochimaru stands to teach him more.

Naruto freezes at the sight of Gaara again and cannot take over the role of avenger so smoothly: "Let's run ... C'mon!"<sup>[18]</sup>. Speaking of that arc, when Sasuke saw Orochimaru he lost his wits and didn't notice the massive snake right behind him, likewise here Naruto doesn't even notice Gaara charging for his comrades; interestingly enough Sakura is the only one who can stand boldly to defend him, which invokes the concept of "being precious" once again... time for another flashback!

We revert to when he was very young, sitting on the swing near some kids playing football. He saw one of them boot it up on the mountainside and kindly used the sand to help it down. The problem is, Gaara is so crippled with loneliness that he has become hypersensitive to any form of interaction and sees this as his chance to finally meet someone; we would usually just pass the ball back to them as it's not ours to continue the game, the act remains in the land of gesture where it should be and the interaction

is over. But Gaara wanted this moment to be special, he doesn't have a constant stream of interactions which numb him enough to understand the laws of sociability. He holds onto the ball for too long as if he owns it, confusing the kids who think of him as the monster which has now claimed ownership of their ball. Gaara needs to recognise his initial position as an outsider and until he can at least give the illusion that he is sociable, he will continue to make those sorts of blunders. He doesn't know how he portrays himself to others, or what images he invokes, because nobody speaks to him. Things begin to break down and the kids try to run. Knowing how close he was breaks his heart and he ignores all the rules and grabs them with his sand. To the child this is the touch of the monster and each interaction like this is training them to be scared of him. It takes his guardian Yashamaru to break it up, "Lord Gaara please calm yourself"<sup>[19]</sup> which means this isn't play, this is scaring those kids.

After injuring Yashamaru, they arrive back home where Gaara is trying to stab himself in the hand to understand what pain feels like, not just for his own awareness but to try and relate to people. "Yashamaru, what does it mean to be hurt?"<sup>[20]</sup>. Whilst he may accrue anecdotes, information and perspectives, I could try telling a blind person exactly how the eye takes light, how it gets interpreted by the visual cortex to build a picture of various hues etc - but that goes none of the way in explaining how that person would *feel* when they see colour for the first time. Philosophical indeed, and there is the case for such things never being able to substitute for qualia, which is the phenomenon felt by oneself coinciding with any particular event. Yashamaru describes pain as deeply uncomfortable which one should try to avoid, and this definition actually helps as he realises the feeling in his heart can be considered pain. Maybe he *can* relate to people!

Naturally the second question arises: how do I get rid of it? Yashamaru describes the difference between an ordinary injury, where blood and

immune cells rush to the scene and start doing their work, with a wound to the heart. In this case, "It's a bothersome cure... for you can only receive it from another"<sup>[21]</sup>: love is bestowed upon us by those who desire to care for and protect us. It's an interesting definition as it says love is passed to us through this effort, but who knows whether the person themselves (the sender) feels love. It seems it's the only emotion that we have to at least pretend to embody when giving to another person. Love that cannot be reciprocated or understood can be irksome and Gaara has never met his mother, so he is subject to a constant love he finds hard to channel back. This is also why Yashamaru's answer about him already receiving love doesn't fix him, as he wants someone with whom he can forge a friendship with and establish interpersonal ties. He only regresses to worshipping his mother the way he does due to the combination of loneliness and the fact she is the last person with any concern for him.

Another question... "Yashamaru, do you ... hate me?"<sup>[22]</sup>. Do you wish to ostracise me as well? Anyone he has ever inflicted pain upon seems to run away, so he presumes it'll be the same with his guardian too, but Yashamaru responds with something uplifting: "Humans live their lives hurting others and being hurt in return. But even despite all that, people still love more than they hate"<sup>[23]</sup>. These answers inspire Gaara to try one more time in helping other people in the village and he rushes to one of the kid's houses to donate some ointment. He's promptly told to go away and called a freak as the door closes.

I don't think Naruto has ever tried this sort of thing, he just went about his own antics and training, but I think that's because he had a much stronger seal put in place and never had to contend with Kurama at all; on the other hand, Gaara had such a weak seal to the point where he couldn't sleep as his psyche was being berated down every day. He isn't born a bad person, but after killing someone you have to work much harder to win back the trust

of the village. In the very first chapter Naruto was graffitiing the faces of the Hokage, which can be literally and metaphorically washed away but the loss of a life will persist.

Met with yet another rejection, Gaara sits on the rooftop and wonders what it is he must do, if acceptance is even possible, and in his weakest moment he gets attacked. If there was any hope of him calming down and trying again that's out the window. He quickly kills the assailant only to find out that it was his last ray of sunshine, dropping down from the heavens to smite him. Instead of telling him honestly what his reasons were, Yashamaru callously drip-feeds Gaara the answer and twists his soul at every possible turn for maximum hurt<sup>[24]</sup>. He wants to crush this already cracked heart into dust.

## Biblical trauma

This point in Gaara's life is very reminiscent of the story of Cain and Abel, who are the children of Adam and Eve as described in the Old Testament. They are the first people who have to work to survive, in addition to providing sacrifices to God. The Bible remarks of Cain's sacrifice that it was an offering of "the fruit of the ground"<sup>[25]</sup>, but this makes no sense. There are no fruits of the ground, only vegetables. It speaks to the mind of someone in two places.

The offerings we make will reflect the person that makes them, with Abel the Shepherd giving his healthiest, well-fed lamb to God. Such a thing is the crown-jewel of his labour, which signifies his offering as his Being to The Lord, which is the only type of sacrifice we can make if we sincerely offer love. The passage emphasises the nature of Abel's sacrifices which leads us to think Cain must've kept the best results for himself.

For whatever reason, Cain refrained from being the equally symbolic representative of the Farmer, but became angry for being ignored. God is the highest Good, and so demands an equal sacrifice, yet Cain's highest good is himself. It's for this reason that God warns him, "sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it"<sup>[26]</sup>. Use of hate leads to death and misfortune, to which Cain takes it and murders Abel, becoming the first murderer in the Bible. "And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand"<sup>[27]</sup>. The ground resembles Gaara's sand, for the spirit of his mother is constantly fed the blood of his victims, whereby the phrase "Mother Earth" springs to mind.

Cain, like Gaara, has allowed the Will to Murder to take over, and whilst the former received a mark from God - to prevent others from killing him in turn - the latter was marked by himself with the character for love. It seems that God still loved Cain and that's why he marked him instead of allowing him to be killed, but nobody loved Gaara and so the mark comes from the love he's bestowed himself. This is the crucial bifurcation of the two stories, as one is rejected on the basis that their character *could* improve, whereas the other is rejected on the basis that it can't.

Poor Gaara made an offering to the child he attacked earlier and was rejected, which pierces down to his very being as inadequate. His sacrifice was appropriate, for healing ordinary wounds, but how to fix a wounded heart? How did Naruto confront all that Pain?

There is another biblical story that is arguably more important here, which is the one of Job. A tale of one man who was well liked, had many friends, a family and enough wealth to live well. In the Ketuvim Hebrew Bible where this story originates, God points him out to "Hassatan"('the Satan') as an exemplary man, but the devil is not convinced as he doesn't believe in



genuine human piety<sup>[28]</sup>. It is here that God permits Satan to test Job and take away his wealth, kill his children, cripple him with disease and see whether he will curse God and turn his back on faith. This is in equal measure what Rasa wanted to test in Gaara and issues the same ultimatum: “I have placed value on many things. But his worth, I have not yet decided. Tell him about his mother. Test him emotionally. If he doesn’t go berserk, I won’t kill him [...] He can’t be jinchuriki if he can’t maintain calm under emotional duress”<sup>[29]</sup>. But this test of character had started *before* Gaara had felt love, had friends and with no prior reference that benevolence exists, it will invariably make things worse as he admits when he was revived: “Everything I did was a mistake. I burdened you unnecessarily. I felt that you had no value [...] I destroyed your ability to love or even know of others [...] in the end, I only gave you one thing. I gave you a broken heart”<sup>[30]</sup>. Kishimoto doesn’t allow the buildup of understanding to be introduced to combat the ceaseless and unnecessary suffering, but takes every possible scenario to its worst case to see whether there is any mechanism which can pull someone out of that Hell.

In time he managed to find some peace as he forged this idea of “Gaara” the self-referential, self-concerned demon and his flashback ends unlike all the others as he comes out of it affirming his purpose and being sure of himself.

Naruto is also piecing together his own resolve and comes up with a plan. He uses his clones to smash the sand armour at the base of the tail, which is a good trick, but Sasuke wants to take back control of the match: “Rescue Sakura, no matter what! I trust you to be able to do it and then once you free her, take her and get the heck out of here. Even in this state I can at least delay him a little. I’ve already lost everything once before ... I don’t ever want to watch my precious comrades die in front of me again”<sup>[31]</sup>. Naruto has just been acknowledged, and we see Sasuke’s priorities. He will push himself even when he has nothing, echoing Kakashi’s sentiment: “I

won't allow my comrades to die, that is absolute". Naruto has come to understand his opponent, but it wasn't until Sasuke voluntarily sacrificed himself that he truly sees why his friends make him strong. Sasuke has nothing left to give and yet he gives everything, even his life. Coincidentally this is another quote that gets used to describe love - "Love has nothing to do with what you are expecting to get - only with what you are expecting to give - which is everything"<sup>[32]</sup>. Naruto sees how people become truly strong, and he thought Gaara possessed strength because he didn't rely on anyone else, now he sees *that* is his weakness.

Emotionally charged, he releases a massive amount of chakra - Sasuke was just planning to act as a shield, but now he sees what reserves Naruto had and I think he questions how strong he really is, "This is Naruto?!"<sup>[33]</sup>. During the fight, Sasuke was calculated and precise as he combined the Sharingan and the Chidori whilst avoiding being hit himself and this sort of tactical ability and combative prowess is exactly what will beat Itachi - not continuous, animalistic bursts of force like the current Gaara is doing. But since he pretty much battered him to his wits end, Sasuke probably had it ingrained in him that this was the stronger method. He said during their fight "his strength is off the charts" and noticed his speed was approaching his own.

It's funny as you'd think he'd understand why this route must be rejected, especially with Naruto speaking of all its flaws<sup>[34]</sup>, yet Sasuke still couldn't accept it, because of something that I will always accuse Naruto of doing: the use of inexplicable, almost magical abilities that renders all other people stupefied. His friend cannot fathom how some knuckle-head whom he was greatly superior to has come to take the role of the avenger. Besides, it was Gaara who truly spoke to him up on the mountains and pierced into his psyche, with notions of hate that have been infused since the massacre<sup>[35]</sup>.

Gaara can't understand how the tables have turned either: "What is he... All of a sudden. I will not lose to someone like you!"<sup>[36]</sup>. His existence is threatened and so it's time to "show you the true strength of the sand spirit"<sup>[37]</sup>. The battle enters a completely different scale to what we've seen previously, with two towering goliaths changing the landscape around them.

To undo the jutsu Gaara used will require waking him up and Naruto aims to be that alarm clock, if he can just get a good position. Gamabunta needs claws if he's ever to hold on long enough for Naruto to punch him. This is where he takes the image of the beast he saw deep within his psyche and channels it. Using the Nine-Tails to his advantage is a big improvement and little by little his understanding of him grows. First he learns about the physiology, then the Fox's personality and so on. Each of these single relations have to be waded through before we can understand another on a self-to-self basis. At some point there will emerge the understanding of who Kurama is, but for now Naruto is taking aspects of him into battle.

## Fox vs Tanuki!

I have covered the joint hatred that Tanuki and Kitsune faced from the backlash of a folklore which expressed them as the cause of disease, possession, seduction, but there is a fair amount of fighting that goes on between the two of them as well. The most famous example would probably be the tale of Danzaburō-danuki, a shapeshifting-tanuki (bakedanuki) who lived on Sado island and brought tanuki pups there to live away from kitsune and dogs. A few times foxes would attempt to make it on the island, but they would be out-smarted<sup>[38]</sup>. Slightly closer to the battle we have here is the fight between the *Flying-Dragon Tanuki vs Nine-Tailed White Fox*<sup>[39]</sup> which was a Kami-Shibai(Paper-play) production which ran for 21-instalments. Our two representative fighters are

continuing in lockstep with their lore, with Naruto using transformation magic - keeping up with the Tanuki this time - and Shukaku firing wind-style bombs at Gamabunta by patting his belly, which is a nod to the belly-drumming of the Tanuki<sup>[40]</sup>.

## Why is he so strong?

They are both totally exhausted, and they crash into the trees as their avatars dispel. Gaara gave everything he had in this fight, not even his sand is here to protect him now, and he has to throw his first punch.

As Naruto drags his body closer to him, Gaara barks at him to stay away. He became the demon despite wanting to avoid it, and now he's showing the same reluctance and fear that was conferred upon him. "I won't cease to exist... I won't!!"<sup>[41]</sup>. The way he says it, it's as if he doesn't care about killing but prioritises existing. The episode cuts back to the fight between Orochimaru and the Third Hokage and it illustrates the message that Gaara realises: that although Hiruzen is about to die, he won't cease to exist, he is loved dearly by the people of his village and will be remembered in their hearts and minds. He sacrificed himself for the budding flowers of the Leaf, and they kept him fighting long after ordinary Shinobi would've exhausted themselves. Naruto was able to endure by holding onto love as well, but now that he's part of a group he accepts the fact he could kill Gaara if necessary<sup>[42]</sup>, and the fox's eye takes the place of his own.

Both of them remember being young and having no answer to the constant scorn and vitriol that was hurled at them every day, and it was easy for the villagers to assemble into an unconscious mob exhibiting the worst aspects of the group. There is a book called *Others*, which is a collection of short stories of different people reeling from the damage that mobs and groups can do - centred on race, religion, whichever it may be. There is a chapter

called *Original Sin* which seems appropriate, and designates it as the monkey-minded instinct to feel threatened when the group identity is threatened, go on the attack when the group does and so on. The reason such tribalism is a problem is due to it being the progenitor of all large-scale conflicts<sup>[43]</sup>; however, there is a degree of respite, as the author speaks to the effect that shared stories are like prayer<sup>[44]</sup> because they open up one's perspectives to all sides, but we could argue the same can be said for impassioned *dialogue*.

It's fair to say Gaara has stopped believing, but Naruto wants to show him that someone with a similar upbringing can change, and offers his friendship. Gaara is appalled and demands an answer for love, and why he should care about others<sup>[45]</sup>; the thought of being given *unconditional* love is unbearable for someone self-critical as there has to be a reason. In time he will come to truly understand and accept his mother Karura's love, and Naruto says he couldn't live without his friends for how much they've helped him, as they help channel the emotions that he would've had to hold onto himself<sup>[46]</sup>. Gaara begins to see what Yashamaru meant, to which his previous image is completely negated. By seeing a thought die which should've taken you with it also reaffirms his approach to all future insights: that he won't fade away. By killing others he perpetuated his own emptiness, by being full of himself. Love makes no such compromise. His heart was filled when he recognised Naruto as someone just like him, whilst also being an "Other" outside of himself.

# 7

## Sannin Showdown

Pretty much as soon as Gaara gets the boot, Naruto is on the road looking to do some training whilst Jiraiya finds Tsunade. Meanwhile, Sasuke walks in on a comatose Kakashi and demands to know who put him in such a state, just as Aoba swings by and blurts out that Itachi is in the village looking for Naruto<sup>[1]</sup>. Oopsie. His life's mission has just come strolling in and he has the chance to not only kill him but restore his role as protector and avenger of the Uchiha; but there's also the very real feeling that he has to look after his comrade: "If he gets ahold of him... Naruto's finished!! I won't let that happen!"<sup>[2]</sup>; when he was running to the hotel he recounted the day of the massacre, seeing all of his fellow Uchiha dead in the streets, sprinting to see the same end had befallen his parents. He doesn't want that to happen to Naruto, so whilst he knows deep down that he may not be able to beat his brother, he has to try. The manga does a good job of weaving this flashback amongst Sasuke's search, highlighting that day as sculpting his life all the way up to now.

He manages to find Itachi and walks down the corridor with no weapons, no use of stealth, no smoke bombs and says "I will kill you!!"<sup>[3]</sup> before charging. It's reminiscent of a moment in the Chuunin exams where Kabuto stopped Naruto from opening the scroll prematurely and after some light conversation Sasuke finds out he has both a heaven and an earth scroll; he says "I'll fight you for it"<sup>[4]</sup>, but Kabuto questioned his reasoning as a real ninja wouldn't declare that they're attacking, as soon as his back was turned he should've struck. This is due to the fact that Sasuke is a man of honour and wants to beat all his opponents fairly so he can see whether he's good enough to do so without any lingering excuses. He does the same with

Itachi and aims to slay him in a glorious, righteous fashion after what he said all those years ago about “clinging to life without honour”<sup>[5]</sup>.

He’s taken back to those days when he was innocent and asked him who could’ve done such a horrible thing, and Itachi shows him exactly what happened<sup>[6]</sup>. With Tsukuyomi he can repeat the murder over and over, until his mind is torn apart, as nobody can stomach the weight of the loss of their entire clan. Sasuke keeps asking why, but Itachi says it was merely a test. Obviously with the benefit of hindsight we know that’s farcical but even so, many people didn’t buy it as an authentic excuse the first time they heard it either. The native Japanese viewers might’ve been able to write it off under the banner of *Tsujigiri*<sup>[7]</sup>, which is where a Samurai (in very rare cases) would test out a new sword on indiscriminate members of the public. By the time of the Edo government this had been explicitly outlawed with punishment of death, with only one documented case of mass murder throughout the period in 1696.

As we would come to know later, Itachi was actually quite pleased to see Sasuke despite keeping his face hidden beneath his Akatsuki cloak. After all, the reason he came to the Leaf so quickly after its devastation wasn’t primarily to get the Jinchuriki, but to check up on the village and see whether Hiruzen had kept up his end of the bargain<sup>[8]</sup>. He planned to leak all the intelligence he had on the Leaf if Danzo did anything, and his visit reminded the elders he was alive and well, though that message has trickled down to his brother who stands before him.

The fight is over before it even started, as his wrist is broken which means no more hand signs, but he doesn’t want anyone to butt in - this means *everything* to him. He is trying to overcome the torture of that day as his screams of pain as a child have become roars of thunder now<sup>[9]</sup>, but Itachi knows he doesn’t have enough hate to surpass everything he experienced.

He casts another Tsukuyomi on his brother which was universally derided as cruel, but I hope you can at least understand the reason behind it. Sasuke still does not possess the mental ability to break out of the Tsukuyomi, and it is one of the major hurdles he needs to address before he can truly face his brother, so essentially it's the most perverse form of training to condition him to never waver in his goal for revenge. Seeing that Sasuke tracked him down the first time he raised his head above the parapet shows an incredibly one-track mind, and with Itachi having such an influence, he tries to focus all his hatred on him. The world becomes a rerun of the murder for twenty-four hours, but mentally this will feel like an eternity; there is a distressing line in the manga novel *Akatsuki Hiden* which briefly comments on the nature of the Tsukuyomi as "it breaks the soul by means of a genjutsu"<sup>[10]</sup>, so it's used purely to break any psychic resistance to accepting his destiny.

This effort to encourage "the demon within" is really just forcing Sasuke to rely on the curse mark more for future fights as this is the only source he can rely on. There's a high chance it'll just be the curse mark devouring his identity and the darkness won't make Itachi its sole target. If this is all he is, what does it spell for everyone else once the goal is complete? Itachi likely presumed Sasuke would mirror the same martyrdom as he, regressing into solitude and seclusion after completing his mission; that, or be welcomed by the village as the hero who slayed the awful genocidal maniac. But all the expertise he fostered with people like Shisui during his childhood has been stripped away from Sasuke and replaced with loss, abuse and ostracisation; additionally, Itachi had the choice and took it upon himself to kill his own clan whereas Sasuke has been expected to walk this path.

He has come at a time when Sasuke had been questioning who he was the most and felt the air of superiority slip against Naruto. Watching him face off against Gaara, he couldn't believe the meteoric rate of improvement:



“When I watch him up close, I can tell ... he’s got some massive power hidden inside him. Sometimes ... I even feel afraid”<sup>[11]</sup>. He tried doing what his comrade had done countless times, interjecting and saving the day as the hero, but failed spectacularly: “What have I been doing... all this time?! What .. in the world...”<sup>[12]</sup>. This is pretty much the last straw, his purpose is clearly years away from succeeding, drastic action is needed and on top of that he wasn’t even the main interest, again. If hope comes from Orochimaru, so be it.

## Three-Way Deadlock

Whenever we meet any of the Sannin it’s always in a somewhat immoral setting: we saw Jiraiya eyeing up women in the bathhouse, Orochimaru was in the forest biting children and Tsunade was gambling and drinking. After the attack on the village, the Leaf is in desperate need of a new Hokage and Jiraiya has promised to find Tsunade, otherwise it’ll have to be him.

Sherlock Holmes and Watson stop in a little village to gather what information they can, which amounts to Jiraiya sitting in a brothel and Naruto gorging on street food. They end up in a skirmish against what I choose to believe is the local pimp and the Rasengan is finally debuted! It’s an A-rank Ninjutsu which took the Fourth Hokage three years to learn; however, he was having to figure out everything himself as he took the idea from the tailed beast bomb. Jiraiya wants Naruto to undergo the same sort of discovery process, giving him little hints here and there to speed things up but not to deprive him of understanding: “You have to master this exercise on your own. You have the potential to achieve the level of the fourth hokage ... So go for it”<sup>[13]</sup>. He spends the next couple weeks, day and night, trying through sheer brute-force to progress through each stage.

Meanwhile, the “Legendary loser”(manga nickname) has probably the greatest run of her life, the best one we ever see anyway. “I can’t believe I got a line of sevens. This just doesn’t feel right...”<sup>[14]</sup>. She feels like there’s an ominous foreboding as she doesn’t really gamble to win, she gambles for the thrill and for the fact it stops her mind thinking about the ones she lost in war. Once they’ve cashed the winnings it’s time to head off... but not before seeing an old friend.

Snakes crash through the castle, and the withered genius steps down to greet her. Everything Orochimaru does is masterfully orchestrated to pull Tsunade into his sphere of influence: the blunt way he says he murders the Third Hokage is meant to destabilise and catch her off guard, so that the second punch - the mention of her lost beloveds - is more emotional. The pain rises to the surface and when he offers to bring them back to life she is more likely to accept. Being impulsive and thinking in the short-term as well, combined with her genuine love and unresolved trauma makes this offer incredibly tempting. Just to add the sadistic cherry on top, he bites his finger until it bleeds to trigger her haemophobia (fear of blood).

She wanders off to a random bar to drink her sorrows away, but miraculously comes face to face with Jiraiya and Naruto. From being ensconced in total evil to now having warmer nostalgia of the village, she gets the news that she has been made Fifth Hokage stacked on top. She declines for a few reasons: first is probably genuine reticence to assume such a responsibility, even though she may love the village just as Jiraiya does; and second is the possibility that she mulls over Orochimaru’s offer and needs to accept the village’s fate if it means she gets Don and Nawaki back.

“The title of Hokage’s a joke. Only a fool would take it”<sup>[15]</sup>. In the anime they’re seen playing some kind of poker spinoff and they have five cards

each. She drops the hand as it was about to be a royal flush, but she doesn't have the King. Forgive me for possibly reading into the moment too much, but the reason the King isn't there may be because of what Asuma said regarding Shogi pieces: the King isn't really the most important, it's the combined efforts of the Rooks and Knights, the Bishops and Pawns and so on that fight for those who shall carry Konoha on their shoulders. The King may not be present in her hand because she isn't fit to be leader, seeing that she scoffs at the sacrifices of the Fourth, "Sacrificing his life for the sake of the village ... Life is not like money. To risk and throw it away so easily, is a fool's errand"<sup>[16]</sup>. She mocks the Third for trying to be a hero at his ripe old age, choosing to ignore his efforts as the village is "no safer than it ever was"<sup>[17]</sup>.

She jabs at a village that took her two sources of happiness, so why would she be Hokage? Maybe if the village dissolves it would be a kind of liberation, as nobody else has to sacrifice their beloveds either. But this darn kid seems to be quite touchy about mocking her predecessors. The short-tempered pair head outside and the fight goes about as well as you'd expect for Naruto. She enquires about his fascination and he manages to quip the exact line that Don and Nawaki used: "To be Hokage is my dream"<sup>[18]</sup>. Even if the subsequent bet wasn't arranged I don't think Tsunade would've healed Orochimaru's arms as the child resembles the continuation of their ambition, the dream which she longed to strive for too<sup>[19]</sup>. This is why she bets the symbol of the village on Naruto: if he can complete the Rasengan in a week then she can see there is still a reason to sacrifice what you have for what you dream. Both the bet and Orochimaru's offer are to have their ultimatum in a week's time, so she can see which force to believe in.

Seven days later, Naruto has made little progress. He collapses out in the forest to which Shizune carries him back to the hotel where Tsunade is to

have him checked. She guesses that “he won’t wake up until the day after tomorrow”<sup>[20]</sup>, which is her way of saying the bet is already over, dreams don’t come true and she is siding with Orochimaru. In truth, she has thought over the conditions and doesn’t want the village to die, but she also suspects he won’t be truthful about refraining from attacking the village either, so the counter-offer is off too. In this resolve she realises she will protect the village by killing Orochimaru once and for all. She unleashes her monster strength and keeps Kabuto on his toes, but just as he gains the upper hand Jiraiya, Naruto and Shizune jump in. It goes right down to the wire where Naruto is in a life or death situation, with one leg fractured he can’t run at him with the Rasengan. Kabuto makes one last charge to finish it, when Naruto allows the Kunai to pierce through his hand so he can hold onto him and with his clone, he generates the necessary power to finally land the Rasengan<sup>[21]</sup>.

But his death isn’t out of the question. Kabuto severed the chakra network in his heart so he couldn’t receive any help from the Fox, but this time Tsunade is able to heal Naruto as the cycles of losing those with the dream of being Hokage seems to end. She passes him the necklace, stating that he will be the one that symbolises the village from now on. And so, in protecting the village she will do everything she can to protect him. Asuma would be proud.

The reason Naruto survives with the necklace, and the fact he lives in general, is because he embodies the Village Identity - the hopes and dreams, the universal challenges and triumphs that attest to village life, similar to how Hinata was named to symbolise her clan. Tsunade hands the necklace over to the village itself and in doing so performs an identity operation, saying the village stays true to itself by having Naruto at its helm. At the realisation that he is saved, her fear of blood also vanishes. She steps into the present as someone reborn, ready to assume the role of Hokage.

## History repeats itself

The rest of the Sannin summon their signature beasts and this is where I shall hop into the main mythological reference of this section. There is a Japanese novel called *Katakiuchi Kidan Jiraiya Monogatari*, or *The tale of Jiraiya the gallant*, which was released in 43 instalments over a period of almost 30 years, detailing the journey of the Toad Mountain sage. As you can imagine there's quite a lot to parse through, with many different interpretations, but there is one story that covers the battle between Jiraiya, Tsunade and Orochimaru, and thus of frog, slug and snake magic<sup>[22]</sup>.

The story starts with Jiraiya who, through loss and hardship, became the head of a band of robbers. One day he tried to rob the home of a young woman but just as he was about to slice her she transformed into an old man, a sage called Senso Dojin who pardons him and teaches him toad magic. He goes on to have a Robin Hood/vigilante personality, stealing from the rich to give to the poor and defending the honest and true. Around the same time, a young maiden called Tsunade was being tutored by an old man in the mountains in the art of slug magic. She knew that if she paired with another who knew the art of the toads they could overcome the robber Orochimaru, who was half-man half-serpent. There are variations to the origins of Orochimaru with some saying he was actually a follower of Jiraiya in the same hoard of bandits, with his original name being Yashagoro<sup>[23]</sup> - until a snake put a spell on him and bestowed great powers, whereby he changed his name.

The story continues with the outbreak of war, where Orochimaru manages to poison the two of them whilst they rested from battle in a monastery. The only known cure is far away on the mountains in India, luckily a student of theirs can fly and get the elixir, delivering the antidote just in time. Jumping back into *Naruto*, it is Tsunade who deals the finishing blows

- the first on Manda, driving the sword through the snake's mouth, and the second is the knockout punch on Orochimaru, symbolising the superiority of slug magic over snake.

It also exemplifies her act of vanquishing evil to protect the village and to remove the snake's influence from the Garden as it were. In addition to the story about Jiraiya and Tsunade battling it out with him, there is another story in the *Tale of Jiraiya the Gallant* which talks about a giant snake attacking Echigo province - the land where Jiraiya resides<sup>[24]</sup>. One day, the lord Gunryō Miyukinosuke, who was Tsukikage - the Moon Shadow of Echigo - got appointed as Regent of the Shogunate. On his way to take up office he was attacked by a giant snake. Luckily, a boy named Orochimaru managed to slay the creature. The lord was so impressed by the child's ability and bravery that he adopted him as his own son and had him by his side. The only problem was, this was what the snake planned all along and had the child possessed as his puppet. The lord soon became paranoid that his other children were planning to overthrow him, and the strategic words of Orochimaru ensured he was the only successor. In addition, he used the lord to feed ideas to the Shogunate that other clans were planning to overthrow the government. It is only because of the combined efforts of Jiraiya and Tsunade, with the words of Senso Dojin, that manages to rescue Echigo from his clutches.

Now, why have I told you this story? Well, Kishimoto has incorporated the dynamics of this folk tale into the idea behind the Konoha Crush arc - the attack on the Leaf by the Sand and Sound villages. Orochimaru ingratiated himself with the Kazekage and spoke of the alliance being too favourable for Konoha and with a bit of his help they could overthrow them. In reality, Orochimaru acted as the same crafty double-agent that ended up killing the Kazekage and assuming his position.

## 8

# Sasuke leaves the village

Tsunade makes her way back to the village and Naruto is certain she'll be able to fix all the village's woes, as he's beaming from the victory against Kabuto and his mastery of the Rasengan. To top it all off he's been bequeathed a jewel worth no less than three mountains - think of the ramen!

She heals Sasuke and he awakens out of his catatonic state with Sakura crying tears of relief all over him<sup>[1]</sup>. Lee meanwhile has a much more saddening prognosis. Tsunade says that despite all his hard work and the cocktail of medicines he's been taking there are "numerous bone fragments lodged deep inside his vital nerves"<sup>[2]</sup>. The surgery would be an incredibly delicate operation which only she could attempt, with the odds of success being 50-50 at best, and should it fail... he'll die<sup>[3]</sup>. It's best for him to give up being a Shinobi as even if it works out it might not be sufficient to go on missions. Lee limps out of the waiting room in silence with sweat dripping down his face, and Guy berates her for telling him all that. She says it's for the best, that "whatever his wish may be... it's better for him to give up being a Shinobi"<sup>[4]</sup>.

Tsunade challenged Naruto's dream of becoming Hokage, betting the symbol of the village that he couldn't master the Rasengan, but this time it isn't about effort; his life rests solely in her hands and the chances of getting through are no greater than a coin flip. In the anime there is an additional meetup between Naruto and Lee which really highlights this crossroads<sup>[5]</sup>: "So did Grandma Tsunade check you out already? What did she say?"; he looks dejected and stares at the floor to which he carries on: "It's a good

thing she came, because you know the village is in trouble don't you?! We're gonna need every ninja we've got". "Yes ... you are right", he mutters. "You better get back to full fighting strength as soon as you can". He's usually quite perceptive, but he's probably still on cloud nine. It's similar to when Sakura spoke about Naruto being careless and annoying because he didn't have parents - to Sasuke.

Speaking of which, he is still in the hospital replaying Naruto's match against Gaara<sup>[6]</sup>. It only angers him more and more, especially with his second humiliating defeat where he was told the same thing: he doesn't have enough hate. He chalks up both of these major losses to that insufficiency, and his last spectacular victory was when he was enveloped in all that malicious energy, not hobbling away like he did against Yaroï. Since then it's been downhill. The tricky thing is that Gaara demands he let go of the one thing Sasuke wants to hold on to: honour. Gaara would kill anyone for any reason - if they were annoying that sufficed. Sasuke cannot function this way for the sake of his clan's legacy, but maybe it's time for a revaluation. He slaps the plate of apples out of Sakura's hand and glares at her, with his stare aligning perfectly with Orochimaru's as he sits smirking on his throne<sup>[7]</sup>; he can tell his new disciple is ready! It is now that he sends the sound ninja four.

Sasuke has the urge to fight Naruto more than ever<sup>[8]</sup>, as he must validate his existence. In the same way that he has gravitated toward the sleepless demon, Naruto has been looking a lot like Lee too: he was out in the woods training every day until he dropped, with his hands burning up from concentrating so much chakra. It's reminiscent of when he noticed Lee's bruised and beaten hands when the bandages came off during his attempt at the Lotus, prior to the Chuunin exams<sup>[9]</sup>. His philosophy has resonated with him, as we also saw his image crop up when Naruto got knocked down during the Neji match<sup>[10]</sup>. But Naruto doesn't just work hard on his ninja



skills, he puts just as much effort if not more into his comrades, which is why it's no surprise that he would accept this challenge so readily. He's led up the stairs in silence as they begin their fight on the roof.

"To think... I can finally beat you!"<sup>[11]</sup> is indeed a very real possibility, and Sasuke hurls insult after insult to steady himself, talking at crosshairs over every little thing. Naruto waits for him to put on his headband, but Sasuke no longer cares for it. Now he hates all this high and mighty talk, the Way of the Shinobi - it's all pretentious nonsense!

They don't speak at all during the match and it escalates quickly with Naruto unveiling the Rasengan, which if it lands will put Sasuke back in the hospital for sure. It didn't seem to be Naruto's plan to engage in dialogue during the fight like he always does, going headstrong and matching his aggressiveness to be the best. Ironically he vacates the meaning of wearing the Shinobi headband he was so proud of, causing a critical misalignment between his words and actions. Kakashi rightly noted that he won't tolerate Sasuke's cheap provocations<sup>[12]</sup>, but is he willing to go this far to win? Can he continue to see Sasuke as both his friend and rival? This dichotomy is tearing their friendship apart.

Both of them snap out of their hotheadedness moments before colliding, but it's too late<sup>[13]</sup>; fortunately, Kakashi jumps in and throws the two of them into the water tankers. Sasuke looks over and is very happy to see water rushing from his one, whilst Naruto has practically nothing. He ignores Kakashi's scolding and jumps down to see the complete and utter disparity in their strengths. Naruto's had completely exploded<sup>[14]</sup> which explains why nothing leaked out. It's a beautiful, simple demonstration of how if Sasuke looks a little deeper he sees that Naruto has simply overtaken him. This fight hasn't affirmed anything, in fact it's made everything much worse.

Kakashi catches up with him and ties Sasuke up before giving his mini-lecture<sup>[15]</sup>. He tells him that he should forget about revenge. But advice like this often fails, as the person retorts that they know nothing, this time is different and they wouldn't understand anything about their circumstances. Right now things are deeply personal and he'll need words that sit at this level if he's going to have a constructive conversation: "I could kill the person most precious to you! Then you'd know just how wrong you are about me"<sup>[16]</sup>. Kakashi says go ahead, because everyone that is most precious to him has already been killed. He explains that neither of them can be called lucky, but they're also not the most unfortunate ones either. "You and I have both found precious friends, haven't we?"<sup>[17]</sup> and the smiles of Naruto and Sakura rest in the background. He calms down and understands part of what Kakashi's saying, and for the rest of the day into nightfall he sits under the tree debating which path to take.

The first is the realm of the Leaf with his comrades doing missions, having Naruto be his rival and he improves that way; letting go of hatred and this vendetta against Itachi being his life's mission. Living this way would mean forging bonds with people for who they are and not having to do it all alone. It would mean a major restructuring of himself. On the other hand, there is the realm of Orochimaru's catacombs and endless testing facilities, abandoning everyone and taking the image of the avenger to heart. Never loving anyone and bonds are forged as a means for killing Itachi. When he sacrificed himself for his comrades you could say it was out of love, but at the same time argue that he did it to keep moving forward; moreover, you could make a strong case for "both Sasuke's", but after this point there shall only be one (for a very very long time).

Finding the decision for yourself is difficult - it would be much easier if someone could just give us an answer and off we go. The sound ninja see this as their moment to cure his distress. After a brief scrap, Sakon can't see

what's so impressive about the kid - "Kimimaro would've been better"<sup>[18]</sup>. "If you stay in this stupid little village, you'll remain human. You won't get any stronger. You'll just keep rotting away playing ninja with your friends here"<sup>[19]</sup>. Lord Orochimaru offers you power!

What Sasuke prioritises *isn't* knowing himself, but to keep moving forward. Moreover, knowing others is no longer necessary either, for it's all about the goal. This offer will take him out of his rut and onto the next series of improvements. They tell him not to forget his purpose three times<sup>[20]</sup> before vanishing. He sits back down and holds a leaf in his hands, often representing the Leaf village, and crushes it with eyes infernal.

## Gazing into the abyss

Not far away is a child equally troubled by his future, but this obstacle may be too great. For Lee this isn't resolved by simply working down a fork in the road, for either one seems to be the end of his time as a Shinobi. Even if the surgery goes well he may never get back to his old self and challenge the likes of Neji, Sasuke, Naruto... is this where his example of being a splendid ninja ends? He sits down in the very place he was made Genin, remembering one of Guy and Kakashi's challenges where they played a game of rock paper scissors (Roshambo). His mentor wasn't fully on board as there was no threat of exhaustion, starvation or muscular meltdown, but Kakashi reassures him - "you know they say luck's part of skill"<sup>[21]</sup> and teases him into playing. Guy makes the promise that should he lose he'll do five-hundred laps around the village, on his hands too.

Just as he's getting to the result, Guy shows up and they begin reminiscing. He says if Lee dares give up on his dream he will suffer far more than he does now<sup>[22]</sup>, he'll only burn up inside from resisting the surgery. Even so,

does he have the courage to throw everything into the arms of luck? One can't gamble their life the same way we play games!

In the silence of night Guy continued to sweat and crawl through lap after lap without a soul to watch him, except Lee. He walks into view and asks why is he doing all this work, and what is the meaning behind the insane self-rules all the time? Guy says he uses them as fuel to make him more competitive for the next showdown: "instead of thinking you just have to do '500 laps if I lose at roshambo' think of it as 'if I do 500 laps, I will definitely beat Kakashi the next time'<sup>[23]</sup>. He always tries to cultivate his own luck as he will have grown and grown for whatever the future challenge happens to be; now is the time to trust in all the investments he has made in himself. There's nothing left to say other than "get the operation"<sup>[24]</sup>, but nobody will fault him if he doesn't want to jump.

For this crisis, there is a very relevant passage in Nietzsche's iconic work *Beyond Good and Evil*: "Whoever fights monsters should see to it that he does not become a monster. And when you look into an abyss, the abyss looks into you". I feel that the first half of this passage is applicable to Sasuke, for he is rapidly becoming the dispenser of violence and hatred that he wants to kill in his brother, whilst Lee is the one becoming depressed as he sees no light at the end of the tunnel.

Another man who spent the majority of his life in this void was Kimimaro, as he grew up isolated in prison and feared by his own clan, having the darkness as his only companion until Orochimaru entered his life. That sweet smiling snake offered him the rope that would get him out, and for Kimimaro it didn't matter that he wasn't an angel of moral perfection. Now he had someone, and died never having gone outside that leash. Darkness is something he wanted to get away from to experience childhood, for his life was completely empty; in a way it seems confrontation with the void is the

last challenge for the living, and to be avoided by one who knows they have affiliated with it.

## The Pharaoh has left the building

Sasuke sets off, and he is walking through the village for the last time when he is stopped by Sakura. She pleads with him to stay and she'll do her best to make it worthwhile, she even offers to help him take revenge. All these things which would make her happy, but nobody can understand him, certainly not now. He shall never waver again, for "I'm on a different path from the rest of you. Yeah, we all worked for a while. Sometimes I told myself our paths all led to the same place. Maybe we were a team, once. But now, I choose revenge"<sup>[25]</sup>. He says thank you for the times they had in Team 7, but now it's time to go.

The tour guides of the underworld are waiting with an unnerving politeness now that he has left, as their orders are to treat him as the boss during their route back<sup>[26]</sup>. News quickly reaches the Hokage and she is aware that Sasuke is in the clutches of Orochimaru for what reason "it's a waste of time to speculate"<sup>[27]</sup>. Is this such a shock to everybody? Admittedly Tsunade only just got to the village and has no connection with Sasuke at all, but Shikamaru's genius could've put two and two together. After some thinking, his plan is "to persuade him with force"<sup>[28]</sup> which is an oxymoron and shows the village doesn't possess any way to reason with someone that could part with the Village Identity.

Sasuke makes it beyond Konoha's borders and they briskly stop, for now is the time to perform a controlled incubation into Hell. A state of half-death, as he will take some supplements to open up the curse mark and awaken the next stage of its development<sup>[29]</sup>; if they don't rein in the effects he will die in minutes as it'll eat away at him completely, so he's quickly sealed into

the coffin<sup>[30]</sup> and placed into a coma once again... but this time when he awakens, he shall be born anew!

The reason I have chosen to label him a Pharaoh is because he exhibits the mythical stories of the Egyptian King of the Underworld Osiris, as well as the good and bad aspects of his brother Set. Originally the latter was a beneficial force who assisted in the stability of the Old Kingdom(2600-2100 BC), as he helped Ra in the nightly battle against the serpentine God Apophis. He was the only one who didn't get hypnotised by his stare<sup>[31]</sup>, which is akin to when Sasuke was able to look at Orochimaru in the forest and still move to avoid his Kunai<sup>[32]</sup>.

With Set being the God of storms, disorder and foreigners it's fitting that he had the chaotic powers to rival the monster, but this involves employing the right amount of disharmony to keep society from stultifying. However, his vilification by the Egyptians came during the time they got invaded by the Kushite and Persian empires; due to them being foreigners it was seen as Set ebbing from his duty of managing chaos and failing.

Prior to the dissolution, the Pharaoh who ruled the Kingdom of the living was Osiris, but his brother was eager to usurp him, so he devised a cunning plan. He crafted a coffin that was made to fit his measurements perfectly, and once he could get Osiris inside he could dispense with him. The only question now was how to trick him. He threw a banquet where the King was the guest of honour, and they danced and sang all night. But for the final game, he brought out the coffin. Set boldly announced that the person who could fit inside perfectly would be allowed to keep it, and everyone tried their luck. Unsurprisingly only Osiris was able to do it, but as soon as he lay down Set slammed the lid shut and with his friends took the chest down to the Nile and dumped it in<sup>[33][34]</sup>. Comparing this to our narrative, Orochimaru and his sound ninja actually wanted to *aid* Osiris into the

underworld instead of throwing him down there to deliberately kill him. Both he and the Egyptian God were enticed into their bespoke coffin, though it's harder to say whether the former was tricked as well.

## Gaara vs Kimimaro

Each of the members in Shikamaru's squad have sacrificed themselves for Naruto to go one step further. They're dropping like flies, but what's worse is another unaccounted variable has manifested. Just as Shikamaru and Naruto get Osiris' coffin out of the hands of the demons, Kimimaro flies down and perches himself on it without making a sound.

He takes the coffin of "Orochimaru's dream vessel"<sup>[35]</sup> and says that he is only able to move by sheer Willpower and transcends the prison of the flesh; in reality he is only pushing past the agonising suffering due to the plethora of Kabuto's painkillers. He was the one who told Kimimaro of Orochimaru's rapidly deteriorating condition, and he would need a vessel soon otherwise he'd have to transfer into a temporary body. He didn't force him or even ask, Kimimaro was itching to prove he had some sort of purpose and wanted to die yielding something of value to his Lord<sup>[37]</sup>.

Shikamaru takes Tayuya and allows Naruto to chase after him, which means this is the last hurdle to getting Sasuke back. The fox chakra is surging through him as his emotions skyrocket. They get to an open clearing and he manages to get Kimimaro to drop the coffin. He demands to know what Orochimaru wants with Sasuke, and he explains the details of what the transference jutsu entails and why the Uchiha is of particular interest<sup>[38]</sup>. Seeing that Orochimaru is a descendent of man he cannot be truly immortal, so to stop his flesh decaying he wears people like suits so he can continue conducting experiments.

He also takes this moment to unveil his unique Kekkei Genki, the Shikotsu myaku (屍骨脈, Dead Bone Pulse), whereby he can rip bones out of his body and use them as weapons, fire them or harden them as a defensive measure. In the anime its display is quite tame but in the manga you see his skin and muscles break apart to allow the bone to pop through<sup>[39]</sup>. This is probably why he has so many health issues as the multitude of open wounds get infected, regardless if he patches himself up after.

As the last of the shadow clones fall, the coffin finally opens and out comes the newly anointed King of the Underworld. What Sasuke must be feeling is unlike any strength he has had before, only confirming his decision was the right one. He sprints off to complete the rest of the journey on his own, and at the shock of seeing his friend leave Naruto lets down his guard, with Kimimaro almost getting the chance to behead him.

But a familiar voice hangs on the wind and delivers a signature kick just in time. It's a surprise to all that Lee is out of the hospital, but he'll get back into action no matter what! He is much like Kimimaro in that respect as he should really be lying down, but he cannot spare a second to jump in. He starts with his standard direct approach and even in the heat of battle he remembers to take his medicine. The only problem is, this is a different kind of tonic. The drunken fist emerges, and the inebriated God of Taijutsu has awoken with attack patterns so eccentric and unconventional that it manages to make a significant strike<sup>[40]</sup>.

Kimimaro uses his clear analytical mind to try and deduce the kind of medicine Lee has taken<sup>[41]</sup>, but this was just a case of mistaken bottles. He wants to believe everything has an expressive and meaningful *raison d'être*, which is reminiscent of the old Neji as they both had a leaning toward destiny. The reason he allowed Lee to take his medicine in the first place is



because he regards himself as a man of high morals, and his character is in fact modelled after tenth century aristocrats that lived during the Heian period, as it's where the two dots on his forehead come from.

But why would someone like him become so close to Orochimaru? Well, it's a combination of extreme loyalty for the man who helped him and disgust for those that cannot fulfil their duty, as the only reason he doesn't kill Tayuya is that she may live to fulfil her mission<sup>[42]</sup>. It would be shameful and gravely immoral to not serve someone like this, though can he get past the reverence he has for an individual to see the broader picture? Ironically, Orochimaru actually doesn't like him being respectful of other Shinobi, as he scolds Sasuke in Shippuden for not using lethal force against the people he had him train against<sup>[43]</sup>.

Lee shares the same mutual respect for his opponent, but he will not serve anyone who isn't dedicated to the village and strives for ridiculous goals like immortality. He fought a similar self-interested demon in Gaara, and speaking of the (former) devil, he has interjected to save the saviour! He may be following orders, but as he says himself he "owes the Leaf a great debt"<sup>[44]</sup>.

He tries to use the sand burial once but sees that Kimimaro can harden his bones to prevent it being fatal. He tries again with more sand and more pressure forcing Kimimaro into second state; they have a brief back and forth to test each other out, but it becomes clear who has the ultimate defence. "My body is ravaged with illness... my days on Earth are numbered. And yet I will not be extinguished, for I am not alone. I am an arm of Lord Orochimaru's ambition. I carried out my part. For that, I shall remain forever in his heart"<sup>[45]</sup>. To which Gaara scoffs, he knows that he will be thrown aside in an instant. "Orochimaru brainwashed you, how sad"<sup>[46]</sup>.

Kimimaro accuses him of knowing nothing about him, he couldn't possibly understand what Orochimaru has done for him and yet this reminds me of albeit a very odd but poignant story. In the book *Talking to Strangers* by Malcom Gladwell he tells a story before World War Two, about Neville Chamberlain going to see Hitler to try and resolve the rising tensions between the two nations<sup>[47]</sup>. In actuality the Germans were already in the armament phase and their prospects of war firmly entrenched, it was only a matter of time. Chamberlain met him and took his word that his interests were solely with the Sudetenland, completely convinced that he knew exactly what was going on and the other world leaders wouldn't have to worry. The MPs at home, notably Winston Churchill, could see through it because they never had the opportunity to be sweet-talked; they could see the direction Hitler was heading by scrutinising his actions.

You see, Gaara is a former demon and knows that they only consider *themselves* in possession of value, and anybody else is just a set of relations and utilities with which to feed upon; on account of their utility being maximised or expired, it's onto the next thing. A demon has to work to grind the person down, to get them to negate and ignore themselves so that they think in terms of the attributes they possess, and their thoughts will begin to shift as well. By making the self insignificant, what is good and bad merely becomes a matter of congruence between parts, rather than dialogues between entities. Likewise, they'll begin to think that their offerings to the world shall be based on mere parts. With a child like Kimimaro, where most of this decomposition is already done, being abused merely for what he had been dealt, he was the perfect target.

Gaara sees all of this playing out, as he had said he would "never disappear" as long as there were people to kill, desperately looking to be eternally self-consistent too. Come to think of it, the legacy Kimimaro wants to leave in the heart of another sounds awfully similar to Hiruzen's legacy. But what

is the difference? Direction. If the sacrifice isn't bidirectional then there is no retention. The Hokage gives everything for the people and they in turn believe that the village can condense down into one, with that marriage spawning the Will of Fire.

It is with this very strength that Gaara buries Kimimaro two hundred metres below ground in the ultimate tomb. Just as one vessel has emerged out of the underworld it seems the last generation is going down, but he isn't the only one who can change the landscape around here! Kimimaro directs all his remaining energy to set the forest ablaze with bones, and he can seemingly traverse to any point, which is poignant as it shows he has ossified to the same level: he has become the medium, for no other form is left standing but sheer Will. In his very last moments he mirrors when Lee stood up unconsciously with absolutely nothing else but the need to prove himself. He attacks from behind with blood pouring down his mouth, just having the strength to utter "I'm not brainwashed, he's the only one who truly understands. You know nothing!"<sup>[48]</sup>. Orochimaru's dismissal of him is brutally captured on the very same page: "He's nothing to me now"<sup>[49]</sup>.

With the fight now over, Gaara reflects on his opponent and recognises how Kimimaro's felt "the honour of his idol was under scrutiny"<sup>[50]</sup>, which was like his own honour being attacked, just like Lee with Guy. "The more precious your idol is to you, the harder you fight for him"<sup>[51]</sup>. He even manages to identify the dangerous ramifications, that your worship has nothing to do with whether the idol is good or bad: "Even if you know he's evil, you just can't overcome your own solitude"<sup>[52]</sup>. We can be alone for a long time and be our own company which doesn't bother us, but solitude is a state where we have tried to forge ties with others and been unsuccessful. Gaara sees the love-for-another in Lee, but he also sees how equally dangerous it can be. It's incredible how he has just come to recognise this

power and yet he already sees how it can be manipulated - that I guess comes from his darker days.

It's funny, when Neji lost he didn't just clear away the idea that he couldn't say things like "you can never beat me" to Lee but threw out destiny altogether. He didn't do as Kimimaro would when his destiny of "being the vessel" turned out to be wrong, he just changed it to "my destiny was to *find* the vessel"<sup>[53]</sup>. Neji could have made the exact same slight shift - "my destiny was to lose here", so why is it that he questioned the notion and Kimimaro didn't? There are a multitude of answers and I shall start with the cold and pragmatic. Kimimaro was dying and on the verge of collapsing, he was moving based off of Willpower and wanted to make Orochimaru proud - for his own legacy and the legacy of his Lord. He needs destiny to sort of enshrine him and sanctify his efforts, so this life wasn't a failure and the tool he was served some purpose; contrastingly, Neji benefits from considering himself free as he hopes by walking through his own Path he can resolve the issues within his clan and beyond it.

## 9

# Naruto vs Sasuke

“Hey, screw-up”<sup>[1]</sup>. Osiris has been taken into the underworld, and the old Sasuke has died to Set’s hand. But his son, Horus, is the one who grows strong and does battle with Set, costing him his left eye<sup>[2]</sup>. As Sasuke turns to him, his left eye too is still in the darkness<sup>[3]</sup>, the eye which sees only into the past. There is another significant usage, which is where Horus goes into the underworld and bequeaths it to the dead Osiris, to rejuvenate him and deliver the power to govern as the Underworld King<sup>[4]</sup>, as part of the Eye’s power is to do with Wisdom<sup>[5]</sup>; it seems in this case though that Horus has given it to *Apophis* in search of greater strength, and this is where the symbolism becomes inverted.

The wings of Horus are typically representative of freedom, but now we see he’s racing to his own capture and imprisonment: “I have my own path. I have no obligation... to you or anyone”<sup>[6]</sup>. When people like Sasuke say they have cut ties thinking they must be free, it tends to only *centralise* needs into fewer and fewer ends, making him more dependent and more likely to have to manipulate people in future.

For Naruto, he remembers all the times Sasuke has been there for him<sup>[7]</sup>: during missions, training and the moments he has given his all to save him; it seems such a radical change of heart that it must’ve been influenced by Orochimaru and Itachi. He cannot accept such a path exists and looks to external forces as the predominant cause. But is it not so that Naruto has had equally profound, spontaneous moments and from then on lived a very different life? Take his first mission, after Team 7 got ambushed and he felt powerless, he made the decision to stab himself in the hand and from that

moment forth try and live by his new nindo, which continued to be reaffirmed by the end of the arc; but when it comes to *power*, neither of them have seen the truly dark and evil side in the other. Sasuke was unconscious when Naruto's fox chakra first started to envelop him and obliterate Haku's mirrors; and in turn, Naruto lay unconscious when Sasuke's curse mark started to facilitate his own evil. Further down the line like in the Gaara match, Naruto was none the wiser to Sasuke's use of the curse mark and in turn he has no idea how Naruto could summon something like Gammabunta. Only Sasuke saw the mask of Orochimaru fall off, whereas Naruto saw the mask of Haku fall off, which formed the basis of the connections that formed in their heart and drove their philosophies.

"Does Konoha mean nothing to you?!"<sup>[8]</sup> he asks. For a time it did, right up to when he left the village, despite Naruto thinking his mind had been shattered because of Itachi's jutsu. Nevertheless he has made the steadfast decision with Orochimaru making sure to reward him immediately with a couple breadcrumbs to entice him the rest of the way. The snake holds the keys to the next levels of progression, but ironically this demon wants the body itself and not the soul. Speaking of which, Naruto informs him that he's going to be used as a host body and he won't get power for free. He has no faith in Orochimaru keeping his end of the bargain whatsoever and believes as soon as Sasuke steps into the underworld he'll be swallowed up. We have this suspicion based on what Orochimaru had said to Hiruzen about making him the new host body<sup>[9]</sup>, but he did mention that "I plan on grooming Sasuke a bit more to my taste before possessing him"<sup>[10]</sup>, so there may still be time.

The village has made Sasuke strong, but to figure out what Konoha really meant to him it's worth seeing his flashbacks, with the entirety of his early childhood shown to us over the course of the fight. "My dream is rooted only in the past"<sup>[11]</sup> to which it shows him smiling as he's piggy-backed

home by Itachi. He had been watching his brother in awe as he managed to throw a Kunai into every target, even the one in the blindspot behind the rock. Inspired, Sasuke tried to imitate him but twisted his ankle. I think seeing Naruto be hot-headed, prone to mistakes and looking the dunce reminds him of this younger, more carefree version of himself and by constantly calling him a loser he wants to distance himself from his prior innocence.

He's excited to be starting at the academy, where "Father will recognise my ability. He'll respect me as much as he respects my big brother"<sup>[12]</sup>. It sounds like a familial relationship which has regressed into a formal, merit-based dynamic - as that's how it feels to him. Until he can start to rival his brother's abilities he won't be given attention, praise or tutelage. This is why he never gives compliments or attention to other people unless they have clear worth. Fugaku doesn't mean it, but he has put extra time and energy into Itachi for he's getting the chance to join the ranks of the Anbu Black Ops, which will be incredibly important for the entire clan<sup>[13]</sup>. In comparison this talk of some entrance ceremony is so low down on the list it doesn't even get picked up. Only because Itachi threatened not to go on the mission did Fugaku glumly resign himself into attending<sup>[14]</sup>, which isn't the most encouraging thing for his child to see. I think because Fugaku forgets he is a father as well as the head of the clan, moments like these which resonate for *Sasuke* Uchiha, but not *all* Uchiha, do not find their way to his attention.

They go to the Ninja Academy and bump into one of Sasuke's prospective teachers, and they have a flurry of small talk before he says "I expect great things of you, Sasuke"<sup>[15]</sup> which is usually complimentary, but he knows this is only because of the standard set by Itachi. "Follow your big brother's example and become a good Shinobi"<sup>[15]</sup>. It seems whoever, and whatever he is, as long as it rivals his brother he shall be accepted. He gets his report

card for the semester and he's the best in every topic, across all classes. That's worthy of getting individual praise is it not? "Keep this up, and you'll be amazing, just like your brother"<sup>[16]</sup>.

Over time, the toll of having to be an Anbu member, a spy for the Uchiha and a double-agent for the Leaf causes Itachi to lash out at the police officers who questioned him over the death of his best friend Shisui. He riles his father and their relationship sours, but one thing that has come out of it is that Fugaku will spend more time helping Sasuke train. They go to the same place where he taught his eldest son the fireball jutsu but Sasuke can't master it first time. He says the crushing line "Thought so... Not quite like it was with Itachi"<sup>[17]</sup>. To me, the first bit is actually more damning as it was his *preconception* that Sasuke was going to fail, nevermind the comparison. But this failure doesn't mean he's without potential, in fact it takes him just a week to master that jutsu, which puts him a step closer to being a full-fledged Uchiha member. This is the first time that he notably gets praise from his father: "That's my boy"<sup>[18]</sup> and he's also told not to walk in the footsteps of his brother anymore. This may be why he doesn't kill Naruto in the end, as he's avenging his clan after all, and would prioritise the words of his father.

After the massacre, he goes back to the lake where he was acknowledged and thinks about his next steps. Jumping in he makes the following resolve: "Big brother ... no matter how dark the path, I will forge ahead in order to kill you! No matter what, I will gain the power"<sup>[19]</sup>. The darkness of the lake is an analogue to the notion of the abyss, and as the flashback fades we see Naruto emerging from the water, like he has escaped the darkness.

Upon resurfacing, he moves from questioning his ties to the village to their own friendship. He asks if all they've been through means nothing to him<sup>[20]</sup>, to which he is surprised that the answer is no. Unlike his response



with Konoha, he says that it wasn't insignificant, and in fact - "you're my closest friend"<sup>[21]</sup>. But, just as he has had to decide whether he wants the bonds for themselves, or the bonds between people as a means, behind him are Itachi's words about achieving the Mangekyo Sharingan - it requires the life of your best friend. Is he only saying that this bond still exists for that potentiality? You have to remember that Sasuke actually doesn't care whether it's goodness, or darkness - it is whatever gives him the most power. If love had seemed to be the greater strength and one that he could tap into, he would've prioritised that.

They load up their main weapons and charge, but Naruto cannot bring himself to commit and the shockwaves emitting from both sides are about equal. He cannot believe that he is coming with the intent to kill: "Right now, that's all he can think about, all his energy, all his mind focused on how to kill me"<sup>[22]</sup>. Naruto sheds tears for the foolishness of his friend.

"When two Shinobi are of a high enough level, they can read each other's thoughts through no more than a trade of blows. They don't need to say a word. So tell me. Do you know my thoughts? Can you tell me ... what's on my mind?"<sup>[23]</sup>. Indeed, when it comes to grasping the last couple days and months, nobody has a clue what is on Sasuke's mind, but each of them have come close: Kakashi understands why he would want revenge, Naruto understands Sasuke in terms of their rivalry, the effects of loneliness, Gaara understands him in regards to pure hatred and so forth; but nobody has managed to consolidate everything. From the village, to his clan, to his teammates there is no answer.

All of them have hovered over his identity and seen the Uchiha in him, brother of Itachi, the rival for Naruto, the interest of Sakura and so forth. This lack of synthesis is what prevents Sasuke from seeing why love is the strongest force of all. In fairness, after the massacre he hid absolutely

everything about his feelings, as happens with such devastating trauma, which is why it's so hard to help, but now he can say he no longer cares about being understood or loved.

Naruto is now going through the same self-reflection as Sasuke, wondering whether this friendship was real or whether he was just deluding himself<sup>[24]</sup>. Maybe he was foolish to look up to him, as Sasuke spears the lightning blade through his chest in the name of friendship. He aims for the heart but Naruto manages to deflect it; no worries, he still has him by the throat - but now the ominous wave of red chakra shows itself, emanating from the permission that Naruto's rage has given it. "Sasuke! Orochimaru can't have you! I'm gonna bring you home safe if I have to break every bone in your body!!"<sup>[25]</sup>. He demands to know who or what is before him, to which Naruto replies "your friend"<sup>[26]</sup>.

Just as Sasuke claims that nobody understands him, a friend will sometimes act to stop you despite you being certain they're the awful one. Indeed, it seems he's willing to drag Sasuke back by force without having to converse or understand him - the very thing which he himself would've rejected if Iruka tried the same. This solution mirrors something that Naruto would say to Nagato(Pain) a couple years later, as he wanted to kill him and restore peace, but then someone would've just returned generations later and decimated their village again; in turn, he might stop Sasuke now but he will try again and again, for the village still has no answers. Is he willing to use force every single time? Then he has abandoned his nindo. He said earlier he doesn't want a thug like Orochimaru having him<sup>[27]</sup>, but the latter is increasingly viewed as the *source* of agency.

Besides, "You were alone to begin with! What can you know about me?! This pain is born from my family bonds! How could you ever know what it means to lose anything!"<sup>[28]</sup>. It's true, but whilst he may have started with

nothing, being around Sasuke “I imagine ... maybe that’s what it’s like to have a brother”<sup>[29]</sup> and being around Iruka, “I imagine he’s kind of like a father”<sup>[30]</sup>. Naruto, in just recently coming into bonds, is still in the “honeymoon” phase of having a quasi-adoptive family unit, and all he sees and remembers are the best parts. But in reality there are often bitter fights between family members, which is one of the points of Sasuke’s flashback. All Naruto has seen and *chosen* to perceive are the good aspects which is why Sasuke’s behaviour is such a shock. Naruto coming into a family of his own sees why it’s so great, and instinctually wants to include him too; as of yet he doesn’t realise its darker side or the fact Sasuke has never experienced being born into nothing, such loneliness shall feel like a respite from the pain of nostalgia. Naruto wanting him to come back after all these flashbacks then is of the deepest offence and shows he hasn’t been there to see what family can really do.

The memories of Naruto that we see are just him reliving the moments that made Sasuke feel like a brother to him, like the first time he saw him at the academy<sup>[31]</sup>. Ultimately, it will only be in their final exchange that they would see each other’s masks come off and what lies beneath, and the extent of their own evil in full bloom too.

Both of them remember a moment where Naruto was walking home and passing by Sasuke sitting at the river, and from Naruto’s perspective he makes a face - one of turning his nose up and being silly but smiling afterwards<sup>[32]</sup>; the memory popped up when Naruto admitted that he wanted to protect him because “you were part of my family”<sup>[33]</sup> and now we see their past interaction from Sasuke’s perspective, where he smiled as well<sup>[34]</sup>; Sasuke becomes aware he reciprocates that feeling of kinship, so much so that upon these words the third and final tomoe of his Sharingan awakens, no doubt because he realises that he *does* have a new family - and now, having to find it within himself to separate from them once again.

When he was with Naruto fighting Haku and his Sharingan first awakened, even though his eyes were the ticket to killing his brother he sacrificed himself immediately<sup>[35]</sup>. Now we see of his most profound psychological shifts as he will let Naruto die for his eyes.

Both Sasuke and Kimimaro stressed the particularity of their pain, which is what happens when one engages in solitude. But why doesn't he accept that Naruto can pull the same card? Well, he actually does. It's just he doesn't care to understand Naruto and wants to distance himself enough so he can have the strength to kill him, but not distance himself so far that he doesn't feel pain over his loss.

He holds Naruto's ignorance over his head in contempt, when all he wanted to do was offer a hand and help him get through it. *"Do not worry that other people do not know you. But be concerned that you do not know them"*-Confucius. Instead of playing games we need to recognise where synthesis can occur, but nobody grows in their own understanding without continual participation and reciprocal opening between others. If you don't have a friend that can allow you to make mistakes during your journey of introspection, you will end up as one of these two. Ultimately it's hard to say whether Naruto is ready for the possibility of hurt that having a friendship can bring, and would rather not understand his feelings.

This may be why he never gave Talk no Jutsu much thought, as right from the start we see him jumping over from his statue to Sasuke's, showing us that mediation is over<sup>[36]</sup>. Every "villain", or person in need of individuation, that Naruto has faced has almost always had a desire for bonds deep in their heart and it was up to him to find their commonalities and merge sort of like a Venn Diagram. Now that they're psychologically separate he will have to construct new pathways and go beyond moments of mutual acknowledgement separate from one another.

This fight actually highlights the dynamics of TnJ quite clearly, despite its repeated failure, because Naruto thinks his words *get* people to change rather than what actually happens, which is where the person considers his thoughts and has to do the work to “meet him in the middle” in their own time. This is why he says “Nothing I say is gonna sway you, is it.. Sasuke”<sup>[37]</sup> as he thinks it is up to him to induce a change. Moreover, he still sees it as a subset of power and thinks talking with people only voices his emotions, instead of realising it is one of the few things which exists that can stop the cycle of hatred, as it voices his heart. What he believes about Talk no jutsu is the same reason he allows Kurama to rise to the surface, as he wants to make Sasuke skew to his way of thinking. His TnJ is known to overstep the grounds of the Shinobi, but he has completely crossed the line(river) and invaded Sasuke’s position for himself.

In the very first chapter when he was accepted by Iruka, it was as the boy and not the fox<sup>[38]</sup>, which was the village providing a kind of secular baptism for the boy, pretending that they could in fact separate the light from the darkness. Here was the teaching that if Naruto could just get Sasuke back into the Leaf he could try and perform the same distinction and remove his need to rely on snakes. The Leaf is precisely the walled garden which keeps out evil as Hiruzen expounds during the Sand’s invasion: “In Konoha every year new Shinobi are born and raised. They live, fight and die in order to protect the village, and those within its walls. Everyone in the village, even though we are not connected by blood, is precious to me... they are my family!”<sup>[39]</sup>. Here he is fighting the snake in Orochimaru in the same way that Naruto is fighting the “snake-ified” Sasuke. It is this nuance which Hiruzen found so difficult to parse, since he had to come to terms with the fact that Orochimaru threatened the village but was also the student he had raised. In the end, when he had the chance to kill him decades ago, he couldn’t do it<sup>[40]</sup>. “Pupils who concealed malice and ambition. I had picked up that you had such foundations in you. I

knew, and yet pretended I hadn't noticed [...] I had hoped you would inherit my Will and strength, that's what I wished"<sup>[41]</sup>. He optimistically believed he would renounce it and ignored the darkness that lurked in the beginning.

## The asymmetry at play

Now I want to introduce a rather unconventional route for literary analysis, which will involve some neuroscience this time. Kicking off with a study that investigated the main ways that people can increase personal power and meaning in life, to which "virtue and hate are alternative levers", and "if you have one, you feel less need for the other"<sup>[42]</sup>. It seems so interesting that the exact same nature of our protagonists is also backed by this pair of motivating factors; doing some digging, what precipitated the claim that hatred can spur action is the intriguing paper *Hate and meaning in life: How collective, but not personal, hate quells threat and spurs meaning in life*<sup>[43]</sup>, which you would think is inapplicable, but the reason collective hate works is due to it being affiliated with *significant purpose*, whereas on the individual level it often succumbs to "meaning-dampening negative feelings"<sup>[44]</sup>. Ordinarily this is the case but in exceptional circumstances like the ones we have here, personal hatred can facilitate crude forms of meaning. He was close to staying with Team 7, which speaks to the above clause, but now he has burned down every bridge as well - except one.

Furthermore there are hemispheric differences between them, specifically in the way their brains perceive the world as they emphasise one side over the other. Using Iain McGilchrist's work *The Master and His Emissary* you'll be able to see the left hemisphere embodied in Sasuke, and the right in Naruto.

There is note of the slight difference in the left to code for non-living things, whilst the Right aptly comprehends the living as an individual<sup>[45]</sup>.

What's more, the term 'prey thing' is used by McGilchrist to describe the way the Left sees as it has a higher proclivity to instrumentalise and put things to use<sup>[45]</sup>. This expresses Sasuke's decision well, since he has capitalised on Itachi as the "prey" for which the Horus myth takes on new meaning. The loss of the left eye that connects to the right-hemisphere shows a dearth in the way of thinking of people as such but prioritises a local, narrowly focused attention<sup>[46]</sup>. Sasuke has restricted his life down to a single goal, but that also means he is going to stop generating possibilities, as he says in Shippuden "I shut my eyes a long time ago... the things I seek lie only in the darkness"<sup>[47]</sup>. You could make the case that the Sharingan itself demands someone inherit a strong left-hemisphere complex as one must continually narrow themselves down into hating others with the primary perception of utility to awaken further powers.

Indeed, *body parts* are the domain of the left, but the *body* is the domain of the right<sup>[48]</sup>, and the Egyptian myths continues to provide insight as when Osiris was torn up into pieces it was Isis that found the phallus and impregnated herself with it, which is analogous to the low-resolution equivalent to intercourse, thus she gave birth to a son of equal specificity.

When the left hemisphere becomes severed from the connections to the right in a procedure called a callosotomy, an interesting phenomena occurs as it abjectly refuses to accept self-evident truths or find new ways of seeing the world, whereas the right hemisphere continues to call for new, more flexible interpretations. Naruto would try to integrate the pain, anomalies and qualms that Sasuke currently battles with, and in dealing with that he'd attempt to replace the current left-hemispheric supremacy with a more robust worldview. But where he fails to do so is precisely in relation to his own demon who he treats exactly as someone of Sasuke's disposition would. Moreover, he cannot provide an answer that will dissuade him from following this path as he has one foot in it himself.

Another point of contention between them is their differences over the term “friend”. Sasuke sees it as just a word which is satisfied when you train together, fight and die as brothers and so on; but Naruto sees it as a symbol which struggles to be defined explicitly, and even by the end he doesn’t really know how to explain it, which is another textbook dynamic between the hemispheres<sup>[49]</sup>; to be clear, it’s not that either side is *solely* mechanistic or symbolic, but have a greater proclivity toward that manner of work.

This impacts on other fields like art, with the left hemisphere being relatively emotionally neutral it bears an affinity for abstract paintings compared to still-life or portraits<sup>[50]</sup>. We see this in the most utilitarian persona of all in Sai at the beginning of Shippuden, who would always sit down and sketch thousands of abstract pieces, but could never think of a title or associate any emotional connection to them.

## Farewell, my one and only friend.

Sasuke’s leap in visual prowess to anticipate every move has changed the game, causing Naruto to take larger and larger loans from the bank of darkness. The cloak begins to envelop him, providing a seamless combination of offence and defence, much like Gaara’s autonomous shield. Instead of the demon falling in line with Naruto’s Will however, one end of the seesaw is getting heavier, as he has found it within himself to condone violence, which gives much creative licence for Kurama to attack as he pleases<sup>[53]</sup>. Jiraiya seems to have gotten him into the habit of relying on the fox in life or death situations and he’s setting a dangerous precedent over his last few fights, regressing to the hateful, unstable version of Gaara. When Naruto spoke with him after they both crashed to the floor during their fight he chastised him for fighting for himself, but he didn’t abandon the idea that he shouldn’t use the demon altogether, just that he should do it for his friends.



From Sasuke's perspective, this is reminiscent of every other villain attacking for their own cause, it's just that this one has laced it with a heightened interest in his wellbeing apparently. Each time he has faced a demon he has had to descend into Hatred a little more, accumulating each new instance and particularity; the opposite is true for Naruto, for he has only been exposed to the highest quantisation of hate over and over again, which is the demon itself - as Kurama said, "I *am* hatred"<sup>[52]</sup>. There has been no loss of clan, family or friends for there was only Absence itself until recently. Shippuden will spend a lot of time highlighting the opposite journey, that Naruto has to handle each *kind* of loss, where Sasuke is having to resist the pain of sheer Absence.

Just as Sasuke thought this would be a simple win, he sees that he has to play his last resort move: to up the curse mark into its second state; Naruto has ironically gotten him to ingest more of Orochimaru's senjutsu chakra than ever, sculpting him into the man he wanted him to be furthest away from. They finally see the evil that is within both their hearts, no longer anything left to hide, the mask and the face sit side by side, and one can see what they truly accepted in the other. Sasuke refrains from slicing through the heart again, choosing to punch him instead<sup>[53]</sup> as somewhere in that moment he had a change of heart, and though he had no better chance than this, he can't get himself to kill his brother and listen to Itachi: "I will not lose control to you! I'll find my own path to power! I will be a better man than you!"<sup>[54]</sup>.

## Next steps

The volume ends with Shikamaru understanding what it means to be a Shinobi: it is one who endures. But a moment later, we see Jiraiya saying to Naruto that he should stop chasing after Sasuke and forget all about him. The difference being is that a Shinobi fights for the village and will take the

heaviest weight they can muster if it can benefit the people. This journey for Sasuke is foolish as look at what this “friend” inflicted on him. Well, to save Sasuke will be the journey in understanding how to save anyone, as by then he will have traversed every corner of hell. To redeem such a meta-individual will provide him the ability to converse with any member of the village.

Jiraiya says that he went there of his own free will so there is no stopping such a person, but this conflates their simultaneous freedom and damnation: if he is free to choose Orochimaru, then he’s free to come back to the Leaf. If he’s going to be scalded for his persistence, then he shall remain a fool his entire life! “You are a certain kind of fool... that is true. And a fool as great as you are may well be able to handle this”<sup>[55]</sup>.

Sasuke makes it to Orochimaru’s hideout, where the bandaged Mummy congratulates him on being the chosen one. His response? “I don’t care. Just give me the power”<sup>[56]</sup>. Kabuto tells him he should consider changing his tone, to which the same serpent-esque glare hits him. Orochimaru is delighted that he has the same temperament and disgust for other people’s opinions as he does.

Meanwhile, Sakura heads into Tsunade’s office and demands that she undergo her own tutelage too. So it’s official, all three of them are now students under the Legendary Sannin, now we leave it to Shippuden to tell us how much they’ve grown!

# 10

## Kazekage rescue mission

Naruto returns to the village and meets his older, slightly taller comrades. The concepts of maturity, learnedness come up and we're led to think he's gained some wisdom, if only a little bit. We're anticipating a whole swathe of new jutsu courtesy of his resident Shaman. As a reader I'm excited to see Naruto in action and no sooner does the thought pop into my mind do we reset to an old classic: the bell challenge. Kakashi activates his Sharingan as he knows it won't be as easy as last time. He doesn't attempt to read through his new novel either - he has to play defence. The fight leads to a stalemate and it drags on into the night when Naruto realises Kakashi's greatest weakness isn't physical, it's mental. He takes advantage of the Sharingan and starts spoiling the ending of Make-Out Tactics, forcing him to close his eyes, only for them to open to the sound of sweet bell chimes. What a splendid result, the next mission should be a piece of cake!

Naruto asks what happened to Gaara in the last two and a half years and it's nothing short of astonishing that the man who least wanted to become Kage not too long ago now holds the lives of an entire village in his hands. People often like to repeat the Itachi quote about having to be acknowledged as primary ad nauseam, but Gaara plans to illustrate his compassion despite the village not being on his side. Now, this is obviously due to the anachronistic political system that the higher-ups delegate the role based on heredity, but this is a case where they got lucky by putting someone in charge who genuinely cares for each villager. Rasa's clan was known to have high political status within the Sand, much the same as how Tutankhamun in Egypt was made Pharoah at just nine years old, Gaara

being just fifteen doesn't mean anything to them, regardless he is by far the strongest in the village.

But beyond ordinary might is a leader who has thrown his reliance on Shukaku away to accept complete responsibility, and with that the fallacy of trying to compromise with hatred as well; this is in stark contrast to Kurama who rarely converses with Naruto directly so he can keep up an image of helpfulness, and almost indifference, to allow him to syphon off energy without thinking about it. There is a tale in the book *Samurai Wisdom stories*<sup>[1]</sup> called "The Samurai and the Zen cat" which I think exemplifies this dynamic. Essentially, a samurai is having rat problems in his home and heads to a monastery for advice. The monks give him their cat to help sort the problem out; however, he seems way too relaxed and all he does is lay next to the fire, sleep and poop. The rat sees the cat is practically a stuffed animal, getting more and more comfortable until his carelessness has him within clawing distance - getting snatched in an instant. Oftentimes we see Kurama just sleeping, or pretending to, so Naruto is concerned less and less about him, until he gets within snatching distance as well.

Fortunately for Gaara, Shukaku is incredibly blunt and he hasn't had to peel off many layers of nuance to know what his demon wants, and fighting such a force has developed his character more quickly than Naruto. Remember that Gaara has been weighted down by the same collective hate as he, in addition to the treatment by family, and the inversion of Iruka in Yashamaru, which mirrors the *particular* nature of hate in Sasuke. This is why there's nobody remotely close to understanding the worst side of people in Suna than him. He has his pulse on the problems, which is far more useful than a man who has been sheltered from all things egregious, and so given the first chance at capitalising on immorality he may quickly do so.

Naruto pushed him to redefine those ties, which prior to him only brought about pain and sorrow: "I want to work hard... and become someone others acknowledge and respect. That's what I decided after watching Naruto Uzumaki [...] He's experienced pain as I have. But he never let it beat him. His example has shown me... I can change my life... my destiny"<sup>[2]</sup>. This sentiment is what underlies the Gaara versus Deidara fight as it's pushing the strengths of those ties to their absolute limit: just how far will you go to save the villagers at the expense of yourself?

He's managing to use the Sand Spirit to protect them, but it's taking quite a toll on him and Deidara knows it, directing all the force which could've been used for offence and defence. The ultimate test of character is now, for Deidara drops a massive C3 bomb which will take out thousands if unanswered. The old him would've been completely baffled that mid-fight an opponent would decide to waste the very last of their chakra on an attack that didn't even target him; he would've called him a fool and proceeded to kill him without a sweat, at the expense of all those innocent people.

Deidara represents the shroud and incredibly crafty Ninja, using any advantage in order to take out his enemies, like using bystanders as a distraction to get his smaller bombs to explode right by Gaara's face. He knew that only the chakra-infused sand would be fast enough to block that explosion, but this is the same sand that's infected with tiny nano-bombs. Quite ingenious. You would think intuitively that it being Gaara's best terrain it would provide a clear advantage, but he can't just do a sweeping sand tsunami like his match versus Kimimaro.

Back in Konoha, Naruto hears the news of Gaara's kidnapping and feels the blood rush to his head, but he considers it justified as all this talk of measured action, pacing themselves along the journey and sticking to

formation is seen as a lack of concern for Gaara's welfare. "Both Gaara and me... we're carrying monsters inside our bodies... and that's what they want! Our monsters! They only see us as monsters!"<sup>[3]</sup>. Just as he has broken free and started to realise his dream of living harmoniously with the village, this happens. Naruto cannot bear the thought that he should die, or should he live and fall into despair again. Temari is probably thinking that Naruto is more of a sibling than either of them are, as Kakashi highlights: "Naruto understands Gaara better than anyone of the Sand ever could. When it comes to how Jinchuriki have been treated all the villages are pretty much the same"<sup>[4]</sup>.

Gaara held firm when reality was telling him to stick to his old ways - if he did he'd have survived. Naruto is having the same test of conviction, for everything is telling him to be his impulsive self and run ahead, to lash out and he accepts the devilish red chakra as much as possible, but will he learn to refrain in the same way?

In making their way to Suna, Sakura discloses her awareness that Itachi Uchiha is not only a member of the Akatsuki but also the man designated to hunt after Naruto - knowledge she garnered by sneakily reading documents from the Hokage's library<sup>[5]</sup>; she's also aware that Orochimaru is the one giving Sasuke power to kill Itachi, and they only have a couple months left to intervene before he's the new host body. She has begun to morph into the same independent detective I jokingly called Naruto, but this has greatly improved her understanding of both her teammates.

During the first bell challenge I highlighted how completely unaware Sakura was of what Sasuke is going through and when he says "I am the only one who can destroy that person", she initially baulked and said "Who are you going to destroy? The Sensei?" but now she gets it. Kishimoto pulls

back one of the iconic moments of her ignorance to illustrate her progression towards understanding, and possibly saving, Sasuke.

Arriving at the village, they get quickly briefed on what's happened. Kankuro fought Sasori in the desert and is now in critical condition. He charged on his own against the both of them - an action equally as silly as Naruto trying to do everything himself; however, he did salvage a bit of Sasori's clothing which was used to track them back to their hideout. Does this reward hotheadedness? I think it shows his degree of ingenuity and tenaciousness despite throwing himself into a battle he could never win. He has only a couple days left before the poison gets him but as luck would have it, Sakura is the only Kunoichi aside from Tsunade who can produce the right antidote. Again, the same challenge presents itself, as Sakura could easily have freaked out realising she has a very slim window of opportunity to save him, but her chances will be based on her ability to assess the situation, identify the type of poison and gather ingredients.

After he stabilises, they make their move to track Gaara. Coming out of the Forest they stumble upon a lowly nobody - some journeyman called Itachi Uchiha. The moment where Naruto is put under genjutsu is eye-opening, as he's trying to gauge Naruto's response to the neurotic extremes of himself. Sasuke, Sakura, Kakashi and Gaara all prod him with the worst things they could say to him, but it's Gaara's that hits home the most: "Only you achieve happiness"<sup>[6]</sup>. He doesn't want that to be true, and it doesn't matter if it's just a genjutsu. This is what Itachi knows: regardless of the absurdity of the reality that conveys these points, it's the same. Tears begin to stream down his face and he's breathing heavily, unable to provide an answer or saving grace, but the agony stops as Sakura and Chiyo snap him out of it.

By the time they finally defeat this crude impersonation and get inside the hideout, Gaara is stone dead. Naruto cannot accept any of this and charges at them, forgetting all his training, even his comrades: “Charging in without thinking, and you’ll get us all killed”<sup>[7]</sup>.

In terms of dealing with emotions, there is a poignant section in *Hagakure* that talks about compassion and courage in relation to their significance for the warrior and the monk. Both achieve a necessary symbiosis that is key to elevating one’s own craft. If the Samurai is only courageous on the outside and without love on the inside he will be unable to fulfil his duties; likewise, a monk who doesn’t have courage and bravery on the inside shall never attain enlightenment in the Buddhist Way<sup>[8]</sup>. Naruto has certainly grasped compassion, but courage has drifted into recklessness and suicidal frenzy. This kind of attacking without thinking is also mentioned in the handbook, called *shini-gurui*<sup>[9]</sup>, translating to ‘death frenzy’, which was typically associated with people who are ultranationalist and will sacrifice one’s life in the name of their country. Naruto is a man who will charge in the same way, but in the name of an individual. The section gives stark advice to its protégé’s about losing your mind and just handing yourself over to insanity so you can make the sacrifices necessary. Doing anything else like careful planning and measurement will paralyse your mind and doubt will manifest<sup>[10]</sup>.

In the first chapter I had talked about Bushido being a wealth of knowledge in regards to Samurai ethics, philosophy and practical advice, but *Hagakure* goes a completely different direction and claims that this very death-frenzy is Bushido<sup>[11]</sup>. If your reason to serve is grounded in great exploits, and killing more people than your enemy, why not become insane and desperate to die? It definitely had its advocates, and Naruto acted similarly to when Sasuke tried to scream and charge the first time he saw Itachi.



## The meaning of Art

Despite the rampaging fox ready to strike at any moment, Deidara and Sasori break the tension completely by having a discussion on the philosophy of art, whether it is "Eternal beauty" or "A fleeting moment", and just as they've veered off course, I shall briefly do the same.

I quite like this article of Maria Popova's about Walter Benjamin<sup>[12]</sup>, as it explains the difference between mere information(a single moment) and a story, which lasts for far longer. Raw information has no meaning in the same way a piece of knowledge is called trivia but an assimilation of knowledge is called wisdom. Obviously this article is in favour of Sasori's artistic perspective as we need stories to shape our lives, that special kind of art that offers a timeless sense of wonder and enrichment; but Deidara would argue that nothing so binding could ever be dignified if it attempts to stick around forever: his art leaves no story, no eternal scent, but how are his explosions different from mere fireworks?

We have to turn to the artistic use of the word "sublime" which was expounded by the work of Edmund Burke(1729-1797). He separates the beautiful and the sublime into two categories with the former based on ideas of love, whereas the latter is based on ideas of astonishment, fear and ineffability. For something to qualify as sublime it must subsume us and shock the soul to where we cannot think of anything else: "The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that, far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible

force. Astonishment, as I have said, is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration, reverence, and respect”<sup>[13]</sup>.

An explosion such as Deidara’s does qualify as sublime, but he smuggles in the ideas of “clean, refined lines” and “two-dimensional deformé”<sup>[14]</sup> to pronounce his clay figurines as inspired. But for him to say the height of the creative endeavour is a “transient beauty that fades after just a moment”<sup>[15]</sup> is quite something to Sasori, who lost both his parents in war. They are his main artistic outlet and the reason why he doesn’t like to keep people waiting, reflecting his time as a child waiting for them to return.

Sasori is a traditional artist who captures the content of his subject and allows for interpretation of this form. This orthodox relationship between the artist and the object has happened to Deidara only once, but was enough to shake him to the core. It was when he was being targeted by the Akatsuki and fought Itachi to avoid being recruited. The moment when he stood between the broken wall backlit by those golden rays made Deidara forget all about his prior beliefs in art, for a moment he stood spellbound. The statues on either side of him have the same three tomoe around their heads<sup>[16]</sup>, which creates this incredible display whereby each element complements the other. All of Itachi’s colours are drained away apart from the searing red in his eyes, maximising their captivation.

We can try to understand why this resonates so strongly by turning to Hegel’s *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, as he tries to define what the ideal piece of art is. When the abstract Idea(the concept/essence of a particular thing) finds alignment with its mould, that being the medium which gets shaped and reformed, such that the conformity brings the Idea forth, that is the Ideal<sup>[17]</sup>. Now there is much more to it than this but we can identify that Itachi’s spontaneous portrait is the Ideal display of the Sharingan, as he allows himself to be the medium that allows the concepts of power,

authority, resplendence to thread through. After that day Deidara began training one of his eyes to counter genjutsu specifically to revoke his prior perspectives, as they say “art is in the eye of the beholder”, but if the eye can change he doesn’t have to consider that moment “art”.

He said at the start of their meeting that he had no purpose<sup>[18]</sup>, but was satisfied with being paid commissions as they gave him time to refine his masterpieces. Funnily enough, there is a segment in Nietzsche’s *Will to Power* where he speaks briefly about the nihilistic artist as one who takes a decadent but nihilistic attitude towards life, seeking refuge in the beauty of form<sup>[19]</sup>, so it seems this is an archetype of sorts. When he has his fight with Sasuke, it’s probably a conflict between the rational scientific mind which coldly dissects his work, and the eccentric artist who claims no critic could understand him. He is the ambassador of this high-flying self-language, whereas Sasori will wear any mask, use a range of different voices and expressions, transfer himself into any puppet body to continue living and express new ways of being.

## What’s changed?

Sakura has never had to see a living Akatsuki member in the flesh, and though Sasori is mostly a puppet he is certainly the real deal. Now she’s facing all the evil she had previously read about in textbooks because she made a promise to Naruto to be at the frontlines - “I vowed that the next time, I’d protect them both”<sup>[20]</sup>. Initially she had felt the sheer scale of Sasori’s combat experience over hers and had to take a step back<sup>[21]</sup>, becoming despondent with how difficult it would be in keeping up with him: “understand the puppet master? Make snap judgements? I can’t really do either”<sup>[22]</sup>. Nowhere other than war and combat are theories going to be confirmed the quickest by reality, as that is a scenario where every move of the opponent is for the expressed goal of killing you. She has to analyse

things objectively and see what she can do, and agrees to be used as a puppet. This is the dream of Sasori: a living, breathing specimen, and yet he doesn't know the secret behind acquiring it. To him human life is nearly worthless and of no real meaning, but *living* is the priority and through the husk of others he will never disappear.

Shifting gears to the mythical, it's no coincidence that he who bears the Kanji for scorpion on his heart<sup>[23]</sup> would come to embody the Scorpion Goddess Serket of Egypt so well. Ironically she was the one who *protected* the vital organs of a dead person, and kept the body from harm, but here the symbolism has been repurposed as Sasori instrumentalises those cadavers for experiments. She also has associations with the embalmer's tent<sup>[24]</sup>, and her corresponding expertise maps to Sasori's grim explanation on how he makes his puppets: "First I pull out the entrails. Then I skin the body clean... then I drain the blood, down to the last drop. Add in a few preservatives, then just string up what's left and we have a brand new marionette"<sup>[25]</sup>, which is remarkably similar to the process of mummification<sup>[26]</sup>. One thing to note is that the heart is often left inside because it represents the most important part of a person, and this is the last piece of humanity that resides in him as well. Seeing Chiyo's jutsu and how it can breathe life into a puppet, it's the magnum opus of puppet-masters and translates to the central name of Serket herself, being *she who causes the throat to breathe*<sup>[27]</sup>.

These commonalities are intriguing, but where our central parallel resides is that Serket is one of the guardians of Horus<sup>[27]</sup> and affiliated with Isis. Moreover, he is the one who holds vital intelligence on Orochimaru and through his henchman they could pinpoint Sasuke's whereabouts: "go to the Tenchi Bridge in the Hidden Grass Village, ten days from now at noon. One of Orochimaru's henchmen is a spy of mine I'm supposed to meet

there"<sup>[28]</sup>. And with that, the two of them hobble back to regroup with Naruto and Kakashi who've been able to handle Deidara.

They lay Gaara down in a field, and Naruto finally realises he's dead. "Why always Gaara...? He's just become Kazekage..."<sup>[29]</sup>. Chiyo tells him to calm down but he doesn't want to listen to her, the woman who put Shukaku inside him: "If you hadn't put that monster in Gaara none of this would've happened"<sup>[30]</sup>. He feels the sting of other people's Will and throws his hope away whilst mourning his friend in anger. Things that Naruto could once take in his stride have become unbearable burdens when the pain and consequences are too real, when friends die and things can't be repaired. Interestingly, Neji is beside him and this message also pertains to him - he may be thinking about what happened to the Naruto who spurred people on to change despite tragedies in the past. Fate has momentarily eclipsed his optimism.

"I couldn't save Sasuke... I can't save Gaara. For three years I trained like crazy... but nothing has changed"<sup>[31]</sup>. Both he and Sasuke by this point have uttered words of the form "all these years have been for nothing", as his friend had this realisation when he got beaten into the ground by his brother, and it was that arc which Naruto has behaviourally replicated. Back then there was no avenue whatsoever for Sasuke to try and stop Itachi, just as Naruto had been drowned in obstacles to the point where he couldn't make it. This happens, and whilst these years have taught him so much, this is one thing you can't prepare for. Naruto has never had to watch a friend die as it was always the enemy that got their comeuppance, but now he knows what it feels like.

It is only because Chiyo offers her life does Gaara get a second chance. The first time he came into the world was for someone else's dream but now they just want to see him as a person, nevermind that he lost the tool he

was put on the Earth to master. To have lived a previous life as a puppet for the benefit of the village, ironically sees the use of the transference jutsu originally designed to breathe life *into* puppets, divesting them of their strings to live as humans.

Temari recognises that Naruto has “the power to change people”<sup>[32]</sup> as Chiyo would’ve never sacrificed herself for anyone, she didn’t care any longer about the village once she’d retired. What caused such a profound change? Well, the first shock to the system was meeting Sakura and realising that she genuinely helped both Kankuro and herself with no hidden intent; back in the days of the Warring States, a friend today may be an enemy tomorrow, so what’s the incentive to help these potential enemies? Sakura could’ve easily feigned ignorance and made the case that the poison was “too complex” and let Kankuro die.

Additionally, during their battle against Sasori she was continuing to heal Chiyo’s injuries despite being near her limit<sup>[33]</sup>, and if that’s not enough she sacrificed herself and was stabbed with a poisoned sword despite not having taken the antidote<sup>[34]</sup>. She completely exemplified Naruto’s principles of “Whether it’s Konoha or Suna ... means nothing to him”<sup>[35]</sup>.

Chiyo could see her selflessness and decided to use the final antidote on her, also imparting her own life force to keep Sakura alive beyond ordinary medical ninjutsu<sup>[36]</sup>. Despite being sculpted by trepidacious times, where relationships between lands were mere formalities forged on self-interest, she has seen the lengths to which another village will go to save one of her own. Originally it was her who sealed Shukaku in Gaara<sup>[37]</sup> believing it would be good for Suna, but now she sees this was yet another mistake - “up ‘til now... everything I’ve done has been wrong”<sup>[38]</sup>. She feels strong national pride and thus sheer humiliation, but sees something unique in Naruto. He puts his hands on top of hers to deliver all the chakra he can

muster, as she admits her own power isn't enough to heal Gaara on its own<sup>[39]</sup>. Ordinarily she would've failed once again, "but ... at the very end, I think I might be able to do something right"<sup>[40]</sup>. Collaboration is what does it, as now Naruto too has *finally* worked together with someone, and seen the result he wanted all along.

# 11

## Team 7-ish

Hundreds of feet below the normalities of village life are the quiet catacombs of the Root<sup>[1]</sup> where Danzo plots his next move. Now that Sasuke is a rogue ninja he hopes that Itachi can understand why he needs to be taken care of. That's why Sai monitors Team 7, keeping an eye on Naruto.

He's gathering his things just before heading off on his mission and gazes at the cover of his picture book; for a single moment he lowers his guard and gets attacked by a fellow Root member<sup>[2]</sup>. It's here that he's given the details of the "Top Secret Mission", but midway through the lecture his colleague thinks he spots an intruder and throws a kunai, but it was just a cat<sup>[3]</sup>. All of this paints their organisation as paranoid surveillance junkies where the central motto is: "Those of the foundation have no names, no emotions, no past and no future. There is only the mission"<sup>[4]</sup>.

On the way to the bridge, things couldn't be more awkward. Sai says he is "trying a different personality type"<sup>[5]</sup> which is a totally foreign concept to Naruto, who has been unabashedly himself since day one. He calls Sasuke a traitorous cockroach who went against the village in search of greater power<sup>[6]</sup>, which is the opinion of someone who knows very little. Sakura gives him a false smile before delivering a hard punch to the face, an expression he'll surely remember next time. He feels no animosity towards her though, he is merely figuring out how to act in a way that minimises conflict.



In their training exercise the essence of teamwork is lost on Sai, for the first instant that Naruto makes his position compromised he ties him to Yamato's substitution and completes the rest of it himself<sup>[7]</sup>. Afterwards, Naruto asks him "Do you know what the word *comrade* means"<sup>[8]</sup>, to which he spells it out. But nowhere in Sai's understanding does the complicated idea of brotherhood get intermixed, as that is the antithesis of solely mission-oriented thinking; this is why moments later he doesn't even attempt to save Sakura when she could've died from her fall off the bridge<sup>[9]</sup>, as neither of them seem to be contributing: "I simply considered what would best ensure mission success and acted accordingly"<sup>[10]</sup>. There is no thought about whether Sakura could be useful on *future* missions, especially since she's a medical ninja that takes years to train, and this tunnel vision will cost thousands of lives.

But as standard Samurai dictum states, the Way of the Warrior(Bushido) is to be found in dying<sup>[11]</sup>, and if you have to choose between the options of life or death, simply settle for the latter<sup>[12]</sup>. This probably explains his nonchalance towards his comrade's potential demise, since his DNA is practically the Hagakure rulebook itself. But aside from his philosophy, his actions are those of a well-trained Shinobi, with his specialisation in espionage, assassination and reconnaissance. This is why he was selected to gather intel on Orochimaru, be the double agent for Danzo all whilst avoiding the scrutiny of his teammates and the Hokage.

It is said that to master the art of spying is the highest form of the ninja<sup>[13]</sup> because it involves being able to discern the truth and the lies from a person's character; to extract relevant information, coerce their character into revealing additional data whilst being able to recognise and shift your own form into places that could garner more is the key. But this talk of exploiting and manipulating other people is the polar opposite to Naruto, who not only wishes to retain and develop his personal identity, but doesn't

want to steer other people into giving him data for the village. He practically wishes to be the antithesis of a spy.

We see why Sai can stomach this line of work as we glimpse into his psychology, specifically when he talks about the death of his brother: "I didn't know what kind of expression I was supposed to be making"<sup>[14]</sup>. He would cry merely because it was the "correct expression" in accordance with how people have come to express grief. Even the death of those closest to him does not rattle him enough to fail his mission. Danzo has certainly succeeded in creating a culture which espouses incredibly high single-mindedness(Ichinen), and warriors that incorporate this into their duty are called *Kusemono*<sup>[15]</sup>. The term also has connotations for describing such people as eccentric, but in the sense they are adjacent to social norms. For Sai, it's clear that he sticks out like a sore thumb at gatherings and is often seen in the library to try and read up on social cues or how to strike up conversations.

## Tenshi Bridge

Yamato scuttles out to meet "the henchman" whilst he attempts to mimic Sasori, but the meeting quickly spirals downward. The three of them get called in, at which point Naruto flares up as he finally sees Orochimaru, the object of his hatred, staring right at him. Chakra swirls around the bridge and tails dance in the air - but he needs more! He starts spouting the same self-loathing points as Sasuke: "I didn't have the power to bring Sasuke back", "If only I had been stronger back then"<sup>[16]</sup>... can he begin to understand why he went to Orochimaru of his own free Will? Taking the shortcut to greatest power, he goes beyond the bars and into the Nine-Tails' clutches<sup>[17]</sup>. Hate has now ensconced him and his consciousness is lost in the process.

He shreds apart the bridge, eviscerates Kabuto and goes after the snake. He pushes him to his limits as he remarks “this body continues to reject me”<sup>[18]</sup>, after having to crawl out of his own mouth about three times and narrowly dodging a tailed beast bomb, it’s nearly over; fighting turns back to the other side of the bridge, where Naruto no longer possesses a notion of friend or foe, hitting Sakura with one of his tails causing major bleeding on her left arm. Luckily before it can escalate Yamato manages to restrain him and separate the tailed beast chakra, but we can see it has burned Naruto’s entire body.

Now that things have settled, the three of them can regroup and discuss their next move, but Yamato takes this moment to bring Naruto to one side. He discloses that it wasn’t Orochimaru who laid waste to everything, *he* was the one who hurt Sakura. Does he know what the word “comrade” means? I guess all too well.

These last two missions have shown something poignant in Naruto’s character: that he isn’t able to endure anymore. He is so close to finding Sasuke and the nearer he is the more he will listen to the fox to get him across the finish line. The only thing he chooses to remain conscious of is his care, not his methods, so he allows the demon to fill in the blanks; Yamato knows he isn’t stupid, and he’s aware that this happens<sup>[19]</sup>, but the reason is because he’s stopped believing in himself to get the job done - to keep his promise and ultimately save his friend, as he admits when he finally sees Sasuke<sup>[20]</sup>. This kind of surrender is a soft form of giving up, but if he still wishes to be a Shinobi(忍), this isn't an option. The Kanji itself carries the meaning of endurance, patience and perseverance, and one can't expect to complete their goals without pain and hardship.

I think Naruto's main problem with it would be the connotations that people should just stomach any pain and repress it, as was encouraged for

middle to lower-ranked Samurai to do<sup>[21]</sup>. Whilst he rallies against this traditional Shinobi culture, I hope he can consider one helpful aspect of Bushido, which is called *zanshin* (“lingering heart”). It stresses the importance of psychological and physiological alertness, keeping hold of the adrenaline racing through your veins despite the heat of battle<sup>[22]</sup>. Hagakure is one of the main texts that concretised Bushido, which is what Naruto wants to revolutionise, but he hasn’t come to understand what is worth retaining versus what should be thrown out. He presumes Shinobi culture as a whole to be entrenched in anachronisms, but much of it is grounded in Buddhism - practices he sorely needs - but first he’ll need to understand *why* it would be better to reign in his anger in the first place.

## Traitor!

Now that the brief skirmish is over, Sai finds Orochimaru and offers himself as Danzo’s convoy, handing him what is seemingly an authentic roster of Anbu Black Ops members assigned to the Hokage. Ironically he called Sasuke a traitor but look at him now; obviously in his own mind he considers this the first step to *helping* the village, but until he can take his chance to kill Sasuke, he will act no differently. He fully trusts in Danzo and hands over his life to him, but how is this different to what we saw Naruto do in regards to Kurama? He has slighted both of them at one point, and yet he concretises both sides of their negligence.

This may be another case of apophenia, but it’s interesting to see that Sasuke left his headband and Sai left his picture book behind when going to Orochimaru, and Naruto abandoned his friends when assimilating with the Fox - the exact things which tethered them to the world of the living had to be severed when “selling the soul”.

Once at the hideout, Sai becomes the first member of Team 7 to see Sasuke in over two years. But only those eyes are in colour, peering into his blank facial expression. He contorts that fake smile again and tries to ingratiate himself but he's quickly told to get lost. Before Sasuke leaves he mentions that Naruto and Sakura are searching for him, and they didn't like him right away either - but he has a feeling they'll get along better. A flash of genjutsu sends Sai falling to the ground and we presume his friendship has been rejected. For a moment he seems to be broken out of his usual emotionless, mannequin-like posture and observes that he's actually sweating: "Just by meeting his eyes... I somehow fear Sasuke"<sup>[23]</sup>.

Just as he's laying out his things Team 7 manage to find and interrogate him. He has three separate stories that he relays depending on whether he's speaking to Danzo, Orochimaru or his teammates: For Danzo, he sends accurate mission reports regarding the Sasuke assassination; for Orochimaru he drums up talk about Operation Destroy Konoha part two, and with his teammates he heightens the fact he is a double agent, but ignores the bit about Sasuke<sup>[24]</sup>. When asked if he is fine with juggling the lives of all the villagers should it go wrong, well "I'm just following orders"<sup>[25]</sup>; that the Root aligns with Blood Mist village isn't surprising. Renowned for producing the coldest Shinobi capable of completing any task with no regard for human life, and if the mission goes wrong, it doesn't go Wrong. What I mean is, Kirigakure ninja come with a rather harrowing insurance policy, exemplified when Kisame was escorting the cipher core and they got ambushed by Konoha Shinobi. Kisame killed them all off so that the village's secrets wouldn't be leaked<sup>[26]</sup>. In the end, he would admit to "Yagura"(Obito) that he didn't know whether he was truly an enemy or an ally<sup>[27]</sup>, and that he began to feel like a false existence; seeing that it was really Obito coercing the Mizukage only exacerbated the feeling that all the faith he had in his Lord was misplaced from the start.

Sai is trying to sacrifice himself in the name of the good, for something which will benefit the village - heroic is it not? A hero is often shown in the identity of people like Superman, Batman and so on as someone who wears a uniform and dissolves their identity too as this gives them the courage to act and fight off evil; but what Sai has is much more than a uniform, it's a way of life that has completely taken over his speech, his home-life, his friends and family (or lack thereof), whereas a hero is someone who tries to think for themselves, with the uniform *magnifying* this aspect of their character.

Now outside and tied up (like a traitor might be), he baulks at Naruto's continued optimism to bring Sasuke back for he cannot see any way of convincing the person he is now. He asks Naruto why is he going so far for someone who has no interest in him and just as little for being "saved"<sup>[28]</sup>. His bombardment of questions is very uncharacteristic, but I think it's because he wants to see what reason Naruto gives for continuously trying to maintain a relationship with his brother. He says the reason he goes this far is because Sasuke is the one who truly accepted him, evil and all, and such a bond can never be broken.

Kabuto intervenes and says that "people change"<sup>[29]</sup>, but he may be alluding to a person moving from one kind of mask to the next as defining their personhood, which is true in his case since he is a man who has assumed a thousand faces.

Sai wants to see who's right and he's willing to risk the entire mission. He's prepared to change if it means he can remember those times and runs off with Naruto to check every door on the first floor. They take a moment to sit down as Naruto still hasn't fully recovered, to which Sai starts seeing more of his brother in him: "He was loud-mouthed and impatient too [...]" the list of his short-comings goes on and on ... but you know when he did

something... he always gave it his all, just like you. Watching you has helped me remember him”<sup>[30]</sup>. There! He remembers what he was going to draw and he quickly pens the final pages.

His first true smile, one that lifts the whole face is something we all see as sincere. I’m sure he can feel joy, and probably relief, for finally being able to complete his work. To make it one’s prerogative to sever feelings will allow oneself to detach from the intensity of missions, which someone like him is expected to do, but he mistakenly thought he could finish his artwork by doing so. The act of “holding hands” is simply that if there is no emotion or resonance behind it, as he had to feel the meaning behind that action to choose it specifically.

Once uncomfortable to show his picture book to others, he happily explains to Naruto that this is the image he wanted his brother to see all along. When Sakura handed it back to him earlier, it’s a low-resolution equivalent to when Naruto handed Sasuke back his headband, as she says to him “you hang on to it because it is the only thing that proves you actually exist”<sup>[31]</sup>; additionally, “abandoning it means abandoning your identity as a brother”<sup>[32]</sup>, but this is precisely what Sasuke wanted to cut off as that headband symbolised everything he needed to sever for greater power. For someone who has no inner reticence about separation, how can Naruto say his bond is still intact?

When Sasuke would finally see his former teammates, they all came off as their weak and childish selves, so this path must’ve paid off. They offered no resistance or challenge, with Naruto only taking one shot of his Chidori Stream before being out of the fight.

He takes the idea of reading people’s minds to a whole new level as he ventures into Naruto’s psyche. In their last match he was only able to see

the demon since it had risen to the surface, but now he can see the roots and Kurama is surprised at his progress, saying “you could actually suppress my power”<sup>[33]</sup>. A key thing to note is that on the bridge Orochimaru was able to see the enclosed Nine-Tails as well<sup>[34]</sup>, so it seems hate recognises hate.

Sasuke has come far, but admits neither he nor Orochimaru are strong enough to kill Itachi. But if there were a way he could hand over his body to him and get revenge, he would do it many times over<sup>[35]</sup>. He doesn’t say it in the sense that he *will*, because he smells Orochimaru’s greed a mile away, but hypothetically speaking.

He’s about to drop Kirin on them, but Orochimaru advises against it as they could still kill another member of the Akatsuki, which simplifies his own mission. They fade away and out of Naruto’s grasp, which closes the final parallel between Sasuke’s meeting with Itachi, where they decided against capturing Naruto and chose to run off instead.

## Time to train!

In the first series Sasuke was weaker than Gaara, which crushed his expectations especially after the two of them had cultivated this grudge to see who was strongest, then his dream evaporated when he lost to Itachi. Likewise, Naruto’s priority was to be there for Gaara as his friend, as the two had cultivated a friendship, but he couldn’t make it in time; in addition, Naruto’s dream of having Sasuke come back to the Leaf was shattered after he impulsively tried to make it happen, which marked his second defeat. These two equivalent narratological failures spur the need for rapid development, and he visits Kakashi in the hospital to relay what happened on the mission. He agrees that serious training is needed and he may have just the regimen which could see Naruto surpass even him<sup>[36]</sup>.



During training we see a real shift in attitude to a man who has to prove himself<sup>[37]</sup>. It's the first time in Shippuden when he's recognised the need to control the Fox's energy and separate it from his own goals, as no matter how much he tried to use it, it seemed to only impede his chances. Now that he finally *saw* Sasuke it snapped him out of the fantasy that this was going to be easy.

His relationship with Kurama regresses to an instrumentalisation because he sees that he can't operate interpersonally with him, as of right now he doesn't have the dialogical ability and always gets possessed. Jiraiya's advocacy of direct contact has thus been replaced and we see that he scales this thought to villains like Kakuzu, not even attempting any resolve.

As he meets up with Kakashi and Team 10, his eyes are a duality between the fox's and his own<sup>[38]</sup>, showing that the beast is on the frontlines but not running the show. This fight will be about controlling that killer instinct, the most dangerous side to the Shinobi. "Look, I know teamwork is important, I do. But right now there is a bridge I need to cross alone, no matter how dangerous it is. If I don't work my way to the other side, I'll just be a kid forever"<sup>[39]</sup>. As he sees what it takes to mature into an adult, it marks a major reshaping of his nindo as well, as teamwork has so often been the key, but not when it comes to addressing *his own hatred*; but this is a fix precisely so he can return to comradeship and not make others suffering the new normal. One aspect of his central philosophy has had to change in regards to accepting some people cannot be saved by him, and just as this is a crucial juncture in the Hero's Journey, he must realise that part of what Sasuke is doing is actually heroic and no longer entirely evil.

Speaking of whom, we see him reemerge in the very last panel of this saga, enveloped by a thousand fodder Shinobi, and yet he manages to defeat them all without using a fatal blow. They aren't his true target<sup>[40]</sup>, and this

explains why Kurama said he had the ability to suppress his power, as sharpening the killing instinct clarified his hatred.

Additionally, he may finally understand the reason Sasuke could now accept killing him, as it goes back to the earlier quote about “he who fights with monsters should be careful lest he become a monster”, as Naruto had been dangerously close to that precedent; but Sasuke is sure he wouldn’t turn into his brother by cutting off his last tie to the village, and can even absorb Orochimaru without being tainted by him. Indeed, while the prospect of power was there for Sasuke in killing him, and for Naruto in learning the Rasen-Shuriken, both have prioritised it as a test of character.

## An index of revenge

The following is a subjective table that I use as a reference for all the contours of revenge in *Naruto*, using these four metrics:

- Effort to resolve? This is where I look at the person seeking revenge and whether they end up amending the relationship they had to their target or not.
- Still with their village? This gives me an idea of whether this individual is part of the correcting, helping process of being surrounded by other people or whether this is someone cut off from the world launching a vendetta.
- Effort by the target to resolve? This is where the target of the revenge makes the effort to try and steer things away from death and to rectify the bonds they have between them.
- Who qualifies as a demon? I define a demon to be someone who has rejected forming any bonds to humanity, seeking mere exploitation and the “pure benefit” that the world can offer to themselves, using a symbol beyond any friendship to any person i.e., to money, power

and so on. P is for perpetrator and D is for defendant, with Y and N being yes and no.

	Effort to resolve them?	Still with their village?	Effort by the target to resolve?	Who qualifies as a demon?
Sasuke Uchiha (Itachi Uchiha)	N	N	N - at time of passing, Y - during reanimation	PN/D?
Sasuke Uchiha (Danzo)	N	N	N	PN/D?
Naruto Uzumaki (Orochimaru)	N	Y	N	PN(PY - if in Four-Tails form)/DY
Shikamaru Nara (Hidan)	N	Y	N	PN/DY
Orochimaru (Hidden Leaf)	N	N	N	PY/DN
Pain (Hidden Leaf)	Y (After fight/talk with Naruto)	Y	Y (Naruto)	PN/DN
Madara (Hidden Leaf)	N	N	N	PN/DN
Gaara (1st series) (The World)	Y (After fight/talk with Naruto)	Y	Y (Naruto)	PY/DN
Obito (The World)	Y (at the very end,	N	Y (Naruto, Kakashi, Minato)	PY/DN

	sacrifices his life)			
Madara (The World)	N	N	N	PY/DN
Kaguya (The World)	N	N	N	PY/DN
Sasuke Uchiha (The World)	Y (After fight/talk with Naruto)	N (but rejoins afterwards)	Y (Naruto)	PN/DN

# 12

## Culmination of the Uchiha

Orochimaru can smell that his vessel is at its ripest, what a sacrifice it shall be! His patience is near the end as well as his body. This vessel is at breaking point<sup>[1]</sup> and Kabuto rushes to get medicine that will bind him a little longer.

Now Sasuke seizes his chance, running a blade of chidori through the door and into his arms. Orochimaru knew he'd come for him<sup>[2]</sup>, as the delicate balance in keeping him weak enough to be taken over and strong enough to be obedient is difficult. Sasuke realised that as the due date for the transference crept up, he hadn't taught him anything that would surpass Itachi, nor would he have gone out of his way to fight him.

But that aside, Sasuke doesn't like Orochimaru's style<sup>[3]</sup> and thinks his obsession with the Uchiha is what caused him all this suffering. I don't think he was surprised that his personhood wasn't significant, as it hasn't been to anyone since the massacre, but he is disgusted with how much he idolises his clan. There are many outsiders who see the allure of such bloodlines but know nothing about their history. In handing himself over he admits that the last light of their heritage should belong to this delirious fanaticism, though he doesn't deny their brilliance either: "It turns out you're just a run of the mill ninja... you're not even in the same league as Uchiha [...] mild brilliance such as yours becomes actually rather ordinary"<sup>[4]</sup>.

He charges with his Kusanagi blade but Orochimaru regurgitates his true form, the Giant White Scaled snake. Its body is composed of smaller

snakes, truly a meta-snake to signify his position at the top of the mythic hierarchy. They begin to wash over him as he activates the second state: “A snake that crawled on the Earth dreamt of soaring through the sky knowing full well it was impossible. Still, hoping beyond hope, it kept its eye on a baby bird that it nurtured in its own nest... little realising that actually... the snake is prey because that bird is a hawk”<sup>[5]</sup>. The white scaled snake has been chopped to pieces, but once these bodily fluids make contact with the air they evaporate, causing a numbing effect in humans - assisting in the next phase of the ritual.

He's now within Orochimaru's transference universe, a space devoted to the passing over of one body to the next. Finally he will get his hands on an Uchiha after failing to snatch Itachi! But just like his older brother, he turns the tables, with the serpent having to hear the same line as well: “Orochimaru, my eyes can see through all your jutsu”<sup>[6]</sup>. But this is on a completely different scale, as he uses Orochimaru's own curse mark - a symbol of his Will - to perform the absorption against him. After the ritual is complete, Kabuto walks past him and is genuinely unsure whether Orochimaru succeeded or not, which speaks to his embodiment of Negation in the snake symbol.

## The shadows of Egypt

Previously when Sasuke had assumed the form of Horus, his transformation was a last resort, one that he could feel was eating away at him and had to be performed quickly<sup>[7]</sup>; now however he can dance on the line of order and chaos just as Naruto was able to do in the last series, with the reduced risk of losing his psyche. His curse mark had been accelerating this Egyptian metamorphosis quite painfully as a means for power originally, but he has come to embody the *story* of Horus as well, which is one that closely aligns with his own goals. It was Isis that relayed what

happened to his father, that he was murdered and dumped in the Nile, and his rage grows toward taking vengeance on his uncle<sup>[8]</sup>.

Remember that this battle for kingship is also one of avenging his father, which he prepared for diligently. As Horus was nearing the stages to take on his Uncle, Osiris appeared before him with some preliminary questions, such as 'What is the best animal for seeking revenge?', to which Horus replied a horse. But this answer confused Osiris as he expected him to say a lion, with its sharp claws and commanding teeth, but his son replied that this is the perfect animal to pursue a fleeing enemy and to stop his escape. This made him realise that he was ready, no longer giving into anger but thinking about strategy<sup>[9]</sup>, just as Sasuke had originally been content with being maniacal and using Hate, he has become truly calculating.

With Set taken care of, we move to the symbol of chaos, darkness and treachery in Apophis. Just as Orochimaru was the snake of snakes, there is an interesting passage in an ancient King's homage to the Falcon God that called him the bull who attacks bulls<sup>[10]</sup>, and thus we start to piece together that one must become equally symbolic if one is to stand a chance against the serpent.

There is a book literally titled *The Book of Overthrowing Apophis*, which granularly draws out every single thing you must say and do in order to renounce this power. It involves summoning all of the most formidable deities in the Egyptian pantheon to destroy an aspect of his being, like his name, magic, body and so forth<sup>[11]</sup>. This is incredibly important, for Sasuke has to contend with and visualise each and every aspect if he wants a chance to survive and we get a glimpse into his preparation when he drops a bit of snake trivia whilst fighting Kabuto<sup>[12]</sup>. In terms of utilising other deities, I mentioned that all were hypnotised by Apep's stare except for Set, who

managed to pierce him with a spear<sup>[13]</sup>, which is how Sasuke started the attack on Orochimaru by launching Chidori at him through the door<sup>[14]</sup>.

In an excerpt from the same book, there is a snippet which mentions the role of Horus. By using the flame of the Eye of Horus, this supposedly takes power over the soul and casts out the shade of Apep<sup>[15]</sup>. Indeed those fearsome eyes have been the cause of victory once again, and you could say it did take power over him quite literally, since Sasuke managed to absorb his entire being using just his Sharingan.

Beyond just Egyptian connotations, Sasuke can be readily interpreted by Shinto mythology, namely Amaterasu the Shinto Goddess of the Sun<sup>1</sup>. Her most well-known story is that after the actions of her brother Susanoo which caused mayhem and destruction, out of either humiliation or frustration (depending on the interpretation), she retreated to a cave and plunged the world into darkness.

This coincides quite well with the dream of Apophis, who sought every night to swallow Ra the Sun God. As the latter moved through the darkness of the waters accompanied by an array of assistants, it was this union between the light and fiery with the life-in-death, reinvigorating aspects of Osiris in the underworld that were necessary to propel the Sun anew to mark the next day<sup>[17]</sup>. What's more, only at the darkest part of the journey when hope is nearly lost does this union manifest<sup>[17]</sup>. All this time Orochimaru had thought he'd succeeded, slowly bringing Sasuke into darker and darker catacombs, moving from hideout to hideout, which should've eroded his resistance to being absorbed just like all the others. Upon the curse mark's first activation, Sasuke had said he was happy to sell

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<sup>1</sup> The shining and resplendent beauty of Amaterasu has been inverted to destructive black flames, given the inversion of love into hatred that comes with the Mangekyo Sharingan. The destructive aspects align more closely with the Hindu God of Destruction Shiva's Third Eye ability to burn desire to ashes<sup>[16]</sup>



his flesh to the devil<sup>[18]</sup>, but Naruto's intervention reminded him of his family ties, which articulated a clear boundary between him and Itachi, and likewise between him and evil. When Sasuke was fighting those fodder Shinobi, it was one thing not to have any of his own blood on his clothing, but he didn't have the blood of any of his *opponents*, which is what illustrates the fact that the filth, the darkness and the grime has failed to penetrate him. What Orochimaru has accidentally done is be the perfect person for enacting a symbolic reunion between the sun and the moon, which has become a type of individuation.

Such a process is necessary to become Pharaoh and upon attaining supreme authority, one is bestowed a Uraeus, which is a small golden upright cobra that's worn in the centre of the headdress. It symbolises the prosperity of the Nile river when the Pharaoh has integrated the snake and become "upright". The cobra itself is the serpentine Goddess Wadjet, who serves as guardian, spitting flames in defence of the King<sup>[19]</sup>, earning her the epithet "The eye of Ra".

The difference between the eyes of Horus and Ra is that the former is the *left* eye, regarded as the symbol of the Moon, and the latter is the *right* eye, the symbol of the Sun<sup>[20]</sup>, with the Pharaoh being the one which holds them both. We see the inverted relationship in the Shinto myths, where Izanagi washes his eyes and Amaterasu comes from his left and Tsukuyomi from his right; regardless of which side it happens to be there is a pre-eminent symbol of renewal in either eye, for both the sun and the moon operate in cycles - whether it is the daily cycles of Ra, or the monthly cycles of Horus<sup>[21]</sup>.

Mythologies will bifurcate on whether the task of the sun is something that needs to see everyday be fought for anew, or whether there is only a single moment of weakness that leads to darkness. We've seen the former in Ra

and the latter in Amaterasu, but looking at cultures like the Aztecs, the God Tonatiuh was said to rely on human blood and sacrifices to make it through the night and into the next day<sup>[22]</sup>; conversely, in Greek myth the only instance that Helios was said to have an issue was when he allowed his son Phaethon to ride the chariot for a day, aside from special requests from the gods to slow down or speed up<sup>[23]</sup>.

## Time draws near

Itachi is making preparations as he knows Sasuke beckons, and both of them will soon get the closure they want, but he has to determine which way he should handle his brother. First he meets him in the cave to see the man he has become<sup>[24]</sup>, and his sullen eyes explode into fury. “You’re not going to just go crazy and charge me like last time are you?”<sup>[25]</sup>; whilst shocked to see Itachi he focuses himself and launches a surprise attack, causing the crows to scatter. He can see that Sasuke is finally ready and tells him to head to the Uchiha hideout<sup>[26]</sup>.

The use of crows to gather intelligence is actually noted in a few mythic circles, especially Shinto as they were said to be guides to Emperor Jimmu. Their appearance is meant to illustrate the Will of heaven and divine intervention<sup>[27]</sup>, and Itachi has always tried to act like a Hokage. In Norse mythology Odin had two ravens that would fly across the world and gather knowledge which would be relayed back to him, which serves the same crucial role as the crow did for the Shinto Emperor.

Speaking of which, Obito is trying his best to make Sasuke’s journey there uninterrupted, and he has caught wind of Naruto’s efforts. He says something very poignant, which is that he senses Sasuke continually going through a process of zoomorphic-shedding from one animal to another and

he's intrigued as to what he will change into next: "all that's left is to see if at the next shedding he remains a snake, or transforms into a hawk"<sup>[28]</sup>.

## Itachi vs Sasuke: Reality, knowledge and the inevitability of history

"How much can you see, with those Sharingan of yours?"<sup>[29]</sup>. A cleverly worded question which can be taken literally, to which he would know Sasuke still sees him as he hoped, and that he had attained the Mangekyo; or, Sasuke would reply that he has "seen the truth" metaphorically, from which point they would have a very different conversation. Itachi has the job of delicately calibrating his theatre, probably holding a handful of stories he could pluck given who and what Sasuke is aware of, but it seems he can simply extend the facade he has always shown him further - the power hungry megalomaniac.

They engage in another small close-combat match and the same phrase "you've gotten stronger" reappears<sup>[30]</sup>, alongside the crows and genjutsu in the previous cave. It resembles the data-point collecting of the Izanami, which is a jutsu I doubt Itachi picked up in death, and the use case of it aligns here: to facilitate self-reflection in the individual. Whilst all Itachi has ever done is lie to Sasuke, with this fight he hopes to liberate him from the burden of having to spend his entire life training to kill him. The goal of this match will be to pull Amaterasu out of her cave, by seeing whether she(Sasuke) will be willing to accept new lines of truth<sup>[31]</sup>.

The mythological concept has become entwined with the philosophical idea of Plato's cave, which is the story of how people can live in ignorance as what they take to be true is facilitated by an illusion. Plato notes how difficult and nearly impossible it would be to change their perspective, with people likely to refuse the truth even if they were taken out. In an attempt

to liberate Sasuke, Itachi uses this opportunity to talk about Madara and his current existence as a way of expanding his mind in regards to things he has taken for certain. It's interesting that he's pushing Sasuke to force a particular resolution, and yet he says knowledge and awareness are equivocal; the understanding he possesses of his younger brother despite how predictable he may seem, is imperfect - so despite him saying that we are tethered to our own individual bounds he still has the temerity to interject. It's also ironic because the very example he gives of Madara is ascertained by what he sees of him, hears of him and the feats he achieved like controlling the Nine-Tails - and yet this is no different to the type of illusion he constructs now.

Regardless, Sasuke isn't listening and says that his Sharingan can see through genjutsu<sup>[32]</sup>, implying he can pierce lies and pretences, but as we gradually improve *our* awareness, we see he never glimpsed what really beheld him. What lured Amaterasu out in the end were the different gods and goddesses pretending to have a raucous party outside which heightened her curiosity, then just as she peered out someone put a mirror in front of her face to which the bright reflection astonished her and she was quickly led out with the entrance sealed behind her. Will Itachi really get Amaterasu to self-reflect with his words? This is the target, the stain of the Uchiha name which must be removed!

Moving onto other preconceptions, he brings into question Sasuke's ideas of him ever being the kind and gentle older brother, presumably to make severing their bond much easier. For Sasuke, he couldn't believe his clan, family and friends had all been slaughtered, hoping it wasn't real - just a horrible genjutsu - "but there was no mistake, I was trapped in reality"<sup>[33]</sup>. He wants him to explain how *that* is equivocal.

They continue, talking about the secrets of the Mangekyo and how Madara became the first man to awaken it along with his brother Izuna<sup>[34]</sup>. They united the Uchiha and ruled with their visual prowess, but Madara began to suffer the effects of prolonged usage and his eyes began to lose their light. Trying every method he could think of, he despaired and eventually stole his brother's eyes. From then on, his vision never waned with the newfound powers of the Eternal Mangekyo Sharingan. Around this time the clan became increasingly aware of how these powers could be obtained and now they knew of a way to mitigate the side-effects, but it didn't always work and new jutsu weren't guaranteed either, this wisdom only gleaned after countless sacrifices.

"From the time you were born into our clan... you too were entwined in its blood-soaked destiny!"<sup>[35]</sup>. He wants Sasuke to see that the man he's become is just part of this unfolding - just look at all the Uchiha who have come before. Likewise, Itachi can't rule out that Sasuke's genuinely like this, as he has seen in his younger brother the one who rampaged years ago, running to Orochimaru for power, holding the same image of him all these years - is this "blood-soaked destiny" applicable? He certainly manipulates him like it is.

He shouts that he shall take his eyes and reach new heights and succeed where Madara failed; the ghoulish figure that appears behind him is the representation of an Oni, which is not *actually* there but a spiritual expression of his person. It's appropriate as it's a Yokai that's been called a person-shaped anti-person<sup>[36]</sup>, that exemplifies every kind of evil which torments society, and this is the character he shall be channelling. Sasuke snaps out of his lecture to which Itachi says "It seems you were able to see my internal self"<sup>[37]</sup>, crucially not his *true* self, just the playing out of a particular personality.

The next phase of the battle rages with the Tsukuyomi taking grip of Sasuke and he feels his own eye getting ripped out<sup>[38]</sup> - just as painful should it have happened in the real world. Even so, he manages to wrestle free using just regular Sharingan. Now, there has been much debate around this topic of whether Itachi went full force or not and whether there was any breakout at all; using “the middle way” as a generic rule of thumb, it may be both - that Sasuke surprised him by breaking free, and Itachi reducing the intensity below its maximum. We know that when he was hit by Amaterasu a few moments later, Itachi carefully hit his wing and provided him an out to separate using his substitution. This Tsukuyomi was an interesting one as it was the only instance we’ve seen that didn’t have any time dilation at all, being stitched into reality seamlessly. Maybe he’s trying to illustrate how easily the world of dreams could line up with what he considered reality, rather than putting him into a coma.

## Ninjutsu slugfest

Seeing as genjutsu is essentially pointless for either side to use, it’s time to get to the real meat and potatoes of this match. Fireballs and explosions carve out the battleground and now they’re outside, where it seems Sasuke’s jutsu is stronger<sup>[39]</sup>, probably being amped slightly by the curse mark. Oftentimes we use the saying “fight fire with fire” to mean defeating an opponent with their own weapons, but it can also be used sarcastically for doing something that is completely pointless and makes things worse; Itachi fights fire with the symbolic epitome of flame - Amaterasu being the blackest flame capable of boundless carnage, burning any target it touches to a crisp, even if that target is other flames; this essentially pushes the earlier contradiction to sublimation, which is much like his take on violence: “fighting violence with violence” will only continue and spread, yet if we up this violence to, say, the level of mass slaughter then once again we break through that contradiction, typifying his way of resolve.

It is now that Sasuke uses the very last of his senjutsu chakra to launch the Dragon Flame jutsu, which if it connects with Itachi all the better, but he for once isn't the main target. Both of them stand with pretty much nothing left to give, so the next series of moves shall determine the victor.

"This jutsu guides the lightning down from the heavens... in short, I merely direct its power toward you"<sup>[40]</sup>. The name of this jutsu is called Kirin, taken from the creature of Chinese Mythological origin. They are used as an expression of divine judgement, making sure to never strike someone who wasn't guilty of a crime<sup>[41]</sup> and spearing the guilty with its horn. I think it's also worth mentioning the Lightning God Lei Gong as well, who wielded thunder strikes from Heaven when given the holy order to vanquish. What's funny about this myth in particular is that Lei Gong often misses and hits targets which weren't immoral; this is due to the clouds sometimes being so dark they "cloud" his judgement, hence why Heaven ordered lightning to come first and allow for the correct person to be struck by the thunder-clap<sup>[42]</sup>. Moreover, it seems that the Kirin we see here is an amalgamation of these two, with Lei Gong also having assistants sometimes whip up the clouds and provide downpour for example<sup>[43]</sup>, mirroring the utilisation of the dragon flame.

Amongst the sea of rubble the smoke clears and Sasuke hears nothing - "Done ... it's finally over"<sup>[44]</sup>.

"Is this the death you had imagined for me?"<sup>[44]</sup>.

Kirin is based on the God of judgement which would smite those who have an impure heart, so does it mean that Itachi did have good intentions and our perception of him being truly evil is wrong? Maybe, but he also says "If I hadn't had this... I *would* have been dead"<sup>[45]</sup>, with emphasis on the 'would' so there are arguments for both sides. He boots up the curse mark again,

but he has no chakra left to balance it, evidenced by the fact one of his eyes has that signature purple outline<sup>[45]</sup>. What makes matters worse is that Itachi unveils his final trump card, the Susanoo, which completes a ridiculous set of abilities: “the one other jutsu that took root in my eyes, once both the tsukuyomi and amaterasu were awakened”<sup>[46]</sup>.

The names for the abilities of his Sharingan correspond to the three deities that emerged from the God Izanagi, after he rushed to wash out his eyes and nose after being in the underworld looking for his wife Izanami. The latter is where it's said Susanoo came from, the God of storms. He was known to be far more energetic and impetulant than the other two who were largely quite responsible and forthright; it has been suggested that the reason for his bashfulness compared to his siblings may be due to Izanagi's time in the underworld, as it wasn't possible to purify himself completely from the pollution<sup>[47]</sup>. The way the Susanoo forms, it does look like a spirit that was once skeletal and slumbering which has now been animated, those energies from the World of the Dead finding their way into equally dark eyes.

Interestingly, those eyes didn't need to have the Mangekyo activated and Itachi doesn't even have his regular Sharingan in use as he walks toward Sasuke<sup>[48]</sup>. On top of that, Madara Uchiha when going against the tailed beasts didn't even have eyes at one point and still used the Susanoo<sup>[49]</sup>, so what's going on? It seems the jutsu needs one to master their eyes to awaken it, but once done they're no longer vital to its summoning. This would suggest it becomes the only Uchiha Dojutsu which transcends the eyes and suffices with the body, as evidenced by Sasuke at the Gokage summit when he said “All my cells hurt... so is this the Susano'o's side effect ... if you use it continuously. How bad was it for Itachi?”<sup>[50]</sup>. The entire body seems to be maintaining the Susanoo and generating the spirit that slumbers in only a few members of the clan - those with the strongest



Kekkei Genki i.e., the ones with the strongest Uchiha blood running through their veins, as remember not all members who awakened the Mangekyo got new abilities.

Moving over now into researching the historical origins of Susanoo, consensus stems around the idea he was derived from Korea and introduced to the natives over time. His name comes from the Korean word for a male priest(shaman), *su sung*<sup>[51]</sup>, which as we know is someone capable of traversing between realms, interacting with spirits and doing exorcisms if necessary. This last fight was partly the orchestration of Itachi's suicide, but also the attempt at separating Orochimaru from his brother as once he appears, Itachi comments "finally... it emerges"<sup>[52]</sup>.

What's interesting is that back in ancient times, not only was Amaterasu regarded as a male deity<sup>[53]</sup> but also there were links to snakes in ancient times<sup>[53]</sup>. This form is noted whenever Amaterasu does any promiscuous activities, so this fight could be interpreted as Susanoo liberating the God to shine purely once again.

The story of Susanoo tells of a God who initially strutted around in heaven but due to his excess mischief and destruction was banished and sent to Yomi, the Land of the Dead. Just before leaving he wanted to pay a visit to Amaterasu, but she suspected he was coming to instigate a fight and prepared herself; but after some talk and tests of character she realised that at the moment, he was genuine<sup>[54]</sup>. Ironically, passing this test caused him to erupt in victory and he destroyed parts of Heaven, and in some interpretations defecated in her rice fields. She then retreated to the cave and Susanoo was definitively banished, though the myths have no record of what his time in Yomi was like at all.

We can see that the two brothers are playing out a similar kind of dynamic to these two, for there was a moment that Itachi was the loving, caring older brother who was trusted deeply by Sasuke and then moments later the cause of utmost pain. He is the reason that Sasuke is trapped, and has to go on a journey to try and redeem himself.

Making his way out and into the land of the living, he finds an old man weeping and clutching his daughter. Susanoo asks what's the matter and the man says this is his last daughter that hasn't been eaten by the eight-forked serpent, but the time is approaching with no means for her escape<sup>[55]</sup>. Susanoo promises to take care of this serpent in exchange for marrying the princess to which the man agrees. The monster in question was called Yamata-no Orochi, the eight-headed serpent and was slain by the sword of *Totsuka-no Tsurugi*. Obviously the parallels should be drawing themselves, for the Totsuka blade is what Itachi's Susanoo used to absorb Orochimaru, who had performed his art of the Eight-Headed Serpent jutsu. In the myths the serpent was made drunk by sticking its head in gourds of sake, making it easier to be slain, and likewise Itachi's blade is sheathed in one giant gourd of sake, sealing its target within an eternity of drunken stupor<sup>[56]</sup>.

The Totsuka blade in Shinto mythology doesn't designate a single sword, but any sword of "ten tsuka's in length" and thus for a God to brandish the sword itself would be the display of a "meta-sword"; in addition, Itachi's mirror is said to reflect all things<sup>[57]</sup>. Lastly, the beads which resemble magatama are "of great sacred and shamanic power"<sup>[58]</sup> which bolsters the idea they would be wielded by someone like Susanoo, but he holds "Yasakani no Magatama" which means "a string of magatama"; all three of these items are noted as being part of the three Imperial Regalia of Japan, and signifying possession of them shows the individual holds the essential virtues for governing Japan: Valour in the sword, Wisdom in the mirror and Benevolence in the jewels. Susanoo found the Kusanagi blade in the tail

of the eight headed serpent he slayed, and he offered this to Amaterasu as a means of improving their relationship, and this is the *actual* sword which constitutes the Imperial regalia. Whilst the Totsuka blade is “a variant of the Kusanagi blade”<sup>[59]</sup>, he didn’t get it after slaying this snake, his journey through the land of the dead must’ve been where he acquired all these spirit weapons.

In addition, he has mastered up to three changes in form of his Susanoo, all the way up to the sword wielding, armour-clad warrior. To explain why such a multi-tier element was introduced, I turned to Emilia Gadeleva’s work entitled *Susanoo: One of the Central Gods in Japanese Mythology*. In it she talks about the development of the Storm God as presented in the Kojiki, progressing through four stages. The first is a little boy who cries and brings disaster along with it, the second is a youth who cannot control his energy and destroys parts of Takamagahara, frightening his sister Amaterasu. The third is evidenced by his maturity into a young man capable of slaying the serpent, and thereby saving and marrying the maiden. Last is the man who is master of his own land, and capable of being a mentor to his son<sup>[60]</sup>. Itachi has awakened the penultimate stage as evidenced by his current side-by-side with the myths, but can he go one further and be a mentor to Sasuke?

## Itachi is dead

Itachi collapses, just about able to walk over to Sasuke and pass him the remainder of his strength. Convinced the fight is truly done, Sasuke lies down next to his brother as the rain washes over him.

Zetsu reports this to Obito<sup>[61]</sup> to which the rest of the Leaf Shinobi, Naruto included, are aware he has completed his life’s mission. What next for dear Sasuke? He once again becomes a blank canvas susceptible to being dyed to

whomever gets to him first. He had absolutely no plan whatsoever for this next phase of his life, so it's up to reality. Obito uses Kamui to get to the location in an instant and he checks if Zetsu recorded the fight as he wants to closely review everything<sup>[62]</sup>: his battle strength and secrets, the things they discussed in regards to the village, the Uchiha, Madara and so on. Once again, a theatrical display shall be constructed and it seems whilst one Izanami has closed he has entered into an even larger sphere of illusions.

Whenever Sasuke is in dire straits it always seems to be the worst character imaginable that pops onto the scene and steers him further down the path of darkness, like Orochimaru in the Forest of Death, The Sound Ninja Four tipped the scales into leaving the village and now Obito. I suspect this is an inversion of a common trope in the tale *A Journey to the West* which is where a monk and the monkey king Sun Wukong are often caught against opponents by whom they appeal to Heaven for help, to which it is granted; it was the Will of Heaven that would interject and keep them on their journey to self-improvement, but in this tale *Hell* is the one who “provides assistance” and bends him to their Will. Sasuke is going to be used as a narratological canary in the coalmine for whether a character, if all crucial junctures wobble, can still find solace in the end.

It is around this time that both Naruto and Sasuke are the furthest from who they were in the first season, for none of the latter's victories have come from the honour he hoped to achieve the first-time round to fighting Itachi. Against Orochimaru and Deidara they have all been scuffed to show whether he likes it or not he has had to drop that aspect of himself. For Naruto, he's now gone completely the other way and ignores the pain of others now, happy to kill Kakuzu, fight Kabuto without question and to repeatedly try and attack Obito. He would attack him from right-to-left, and Sasuke's strike would go left-to-right<sup>[63][64]</sup> is a very simple and elegant

way of saying Naruto is going into Sasuke's past, whereas he will be going into Naruto's future had he chosen hatred.

Now he's back in the cave, listening to the painful unravelling of "the truth". Obito started by saying "I am, like you, an Uchiha survivor"<sup>[65]</sup> which he knew to say since if he declared himself as Madara, Sasuke wouldn't have listened and/or tried to kill him. He activated his sharingan as a means of proving this identity, but now one of Itachi's insurance policies activates. The Amaterasu was done to protect him<sup>[66]</sup>, but wasn't this the very same Itachi who moments ago did everything to kill Sasuke? Obito sees this leverage and announces himself as Madara Uchiha, the one who assisted his brother that night: "Only three elders are left who know the secret and none are likely to ever tell anyone the truth. So Itachi's actual mission will disappear into eternal obscurity. Which is what Itachi himself desired"<sup>[67]</sup>.

He begins flicking through pages of the past, reading from its tomes and changing the wording to suit his desire, for example saying that Itachi was "ordered to do so by Konoha"<sup>[68]</sup>. He threads the continual sentiment of ostracisation since the time of the Second Hokage, and whilst it's true that there have been many poor governmental decisions, some out of suspicion of the clan, he wants Sasuke to see that their plight is due to the intrinsic fallibility of the Leaf's village structure<sup>[69]</sup>.

"The Uchiha clan started plotting a coup d'etat to take over the village. And so Konoha's leaders sent in a spy to watch the Uchiha clan. That spy was your older brother Itachi Uchiha. And that's when his odyssey began"<sup>[70]</sup>. His father instructed him to join the Anbu to gather data on the higher-ups, but in fact he was a double agent helping the government keep tabs on the Uchiha's movements.

This might've been where his ties to Susanoo symbolically started to develop, as aforementioned paragraphs alluded to his origination in Korea, the God was always an intermediary between the two lands. In the book *The God Susanoo and Korea in Japan's Cultural Memory: Ancient Myths and Modern Empire*, it describes how Amaterasu was at the centre of Japanese identity whilst Susanoo was on the margin, and his true identity was ambiguous, neither truly Self or Other<sup>[71]</sup>.

Itachi would betray the Uchiha to avert war, as he had seen its consequences as a young child, hoping to stop it from emerging in future. He tried to be like an impartial Zen monk, to care for the village irrespective of his clan identity and to make composed decisions despite the high pressure: "He would drop the curtain on his own clan's history. And so Itachi made his decision"<sup>[72]</sup>. It went smoothly, except for one mistake. He couldn't kill his younger brother.

After the massacre he joined the Akatsuki and "spied on the organisation that threatened his village from the inside"<sup>[73]</sup>. This is quite funny as I guess Obito knew he was a spy and nevertheless kept him in his organisation. Whilst unintuitive at first, he could be a loyal pawn despite his primary allegiance to Konoha.

The majority of Obito's explanations are through, and Sasuke refuses to believe him, shouting that he's a liar several times, until Obito says "you are alive aren't you?!"<sup>[74]</sup> which is a callback to being "trapped in reality" as proof that the *ends* of the massacre were real, and thus why investigate further into their means. The fact he is alive, he can now understand is for completely different reasons than he initially suspected, and he finally starts thinking about what Itachi said to him, that knowledge and awareness are equivocal and how much he can see with those eyes was really a probe into

whether he knew the truth. “Your eyes didn’t see through Itachi at all. Not a single one of his illusions”<sup>[75]</sup>.

He just couldn’t bring himself to kill Sasuke despite killing the children of all the other parents, who also knew nothing, and so his life was more precious than the village. That same village which he accepted dying as a disgrace for, slaughtering his clan for, losing his best friend for, still he was more precious than that. He respected his father’s last wish, but it’s not the sole reason. He loved Sasuke. Granted he pushed him hard when they fought, but he only escalated when he knew he could handle each stage. Seeing that Sasuke could peel away each layer it got progressively more intense “And by allowing you to defeat him, he achieved revenge against the Uchiha clan. By making you out to be Konoha’s hero... He had to fight you and die in front of you. For the peace of Konoha and most of all, for you Sasuke Uchiha. He desired to die a criminal and a traitor, accepting disgrace in the place of honour and hate in the place of love”<sup>[76]</sup>.

Sasuke did indeed shed his skin after the meeting with Orochimaru, Itachi and now Obito. He is no longer the Hebi(snake) but the Taka(hawk) whose mission is to destroy Konoha<sup>[77]</sup>!

## Sasuke and the Akatsuki unite, swapping out one brother for another

With talks going well, Obito regroups with Zetsu and relays how “the eyesore”<sup>[78]</sup> is finally gone and they don’t have to stick to the pact of keeping away from Konoha. He had respected Itachi’s wishes, not out of virtue, but because he didn’t want to fight him as he could use that power for other missions. But in knowing that Itachi was philosophically compatible, Obito needs to confirm whether Sasuke is as well. After he “successfully” brought back the eight tails, Obito wants to see whether he will protect Konoha and

be an annoyance like his brother or not. "Itachi's life shows how he sacrificed himself to protect the village. But my grief at losing him is deeper than any desire to follow his path. Inconsolably so. I do not want peace bought with Itachi's life. Now that I know the truth, I will never take his side and protect Konoha. Most of all, I will never forgive the three elders, and I believe that everyone in Konoha enjoying the peace gained in exchange for Itachi's life is guilty too"<sup>[79]</sup>. "The reason Itachi couldn't kill me was because my life was more precious than the village. Then I feel similarly. That Itachi's life is more precious than Konoha. That's all"<sup>[80]</sup>.

Due to being apart from the Leaf, and having each level of it summarily reject him, if not for a couple individuals, he hasn't got the instinctive need in his heart to sacrifice himself for the sake of the village. Sasuke now uses what was implicit in his brother's actions to make explicit declarations that Itachi is worth more than the village, at the expense of every villager, even though he chose to spare him out of hope that he could redeem the Uchiha and change the course of their history. In his grief, he weaponises his own pain and resentment (which nobody can understand) and he looks at the villagers as ignorant and unknowing about the true pain that underlies their own peace. He has to realise that these villagers haven't had the chance, like he, to understand the bigger picture - would this mean he would kill his prior ignorant self? "If anyone who would disparage my way of living were to come forward I'd kill their loved ones left and right. So that they too could grasp what it's like to experience this hatred of mine"<sup>[61]</sup>.



# 13

## The Loss of a teacher

Whilst I have made fun of Jiraiya's detective skills as a promiscuous Sherlock Holmes, he has come up trumps and found the location of the Akatsuki Leader's hideout<sup>[1]</sup>. As far as he knows the Hidden Rain is still engaged in a bloody civil war, with the leader of the Akatsuki behind the insurgent faction. Jiraiya wants to see for himself the current state of the Rain, whether there is war at all and if there's Akatsuki presence<sup>[2]</sup>.

He manages to infiltrate the village successfully, but his suspicions grow since it shouldn't be so simple to traverse borders with a country that is supposedly at war. Pain immediately detects that someone has entered the village and identifies the strength of the person by their chakra<sup>[3]</sup>.

In the first few moments Nagato has effortlessly managed a few of the feats we think of when visualising a God: omniscience, garnered by the mass surveillance system he set up, by mixing his chakra into the rain and noting any novel disturbances, and omnipotence in having the power to stop the downpour at any time. He exemplifies the elementary mastery that we've seen in Hashirama for the Leaf, Gaara of the Sand and so on.

In trying to gather information, Jiraiya has a cunning plan for luring people in for interrogation. His pretend Saké bar turns into a frog once the customers have their arms and legs trapped and eventually one of them spills all the news about their village: their land hasn't been at war for a long time, as Pain single-handedly brought peace to it and defeated Hanzo alongside all his associates<sup>[4]</sup>. He killed them down to every last woman and

child, which couldn't be more similar to Itachi, but this time the one person he wanted to save was already dead.

Despite all that Pain did, it is for this reason that most of the people, including this Shinobi, respect Pain and he refuses to leak more about him<sup>[5]</sup>. Nevertheless, this has been enlightening and Jiraiya keeps him within the belly of the toad whilst he completes the next phase of reconnaissance.

As a precaution he takes Gerotora out and tells him to return to the land of toads. He begins thinking about the reasons that Naruto came to possess the Nine-Tails and why Minato would seal such power inside his son. There must've been a reason as he couldn't have burdened him like that without cause<sup>[6]</sup>. He is reevaluating things he long took to be true, since he has just come away from that interrogation knowing what many nations are currently unaware of. Gerotora laughs at him for questioning the attack: "Nine tails has always been a natural disaster that mysteriously appears whenever humanity becomes steeped in evil"<sup>[7]</sup> and chalks it up to mythical and divine forces. He knows that the only people that could perform such things like Hashirama and Madara are long dead, but still he cannot shake this uneasy feeling<sup>[8]</sup>. It cuts to Obito("Madara") sitting on his statue at the final valley, thus implying the manual summoning theory is possible. Gerotora described the emergence of the Nine-Tails in much the same way Jiraiya described the emergence of the Rinnegan as a mythical endowment: "Rumoured to always appear when the world becomes corrupt, capable of being both a godlike force of creation and an all-obliterating instrument of destruction... I always thought it was a myth"<sup>[9]</sup>. Is this a sly and subtle way of letting us know the story of the Rinnegan is not how it seems as well, since we know the truth of the Nine-Tails incident?

In addition, Itachi's actions are written off by everyone in the leaf, except Danzo and the elders, as a callous evil action caused by the innate hatred in the Uchiha. In reality, there is much more than meets the eye. In fact, this idea of peering deeper into what one takes as certainty is the underlying thread of these two fights: the identity of both Pain and Itachi are beyond their mere appearances but unfortunately neither Sasuke or Jiraiya could venture beyond their opponent's name. Just as Pain is a God, for Itachi "when he moves, the wheels of destiny turn"<sup>[10]</sup>; Jiraiya in comparison frequently consults the wisdom of the Great Elder Toad and is more hesitant in walking the path of the individual. Their divergence is due to the depth of (dis)trust they have in destiny: Itachi is trying to divert the course of the Uchiha, and Jiraiya is trying to make sure that the words of the Great Elder come to pass.

In making it to where Pain resides, Konan manages to surprise him and doesn't spare a moment in trying to kill him<sup>[11]</sup>. Sometimes we see villains take their time as they feel nostalgic when seeing old faces, but Pain wants to "kill him, of course. You don't have any lingering attachment to him do you?"<sup>[12]</sup>.

Seeing his old students again, Jiraiya remembers the happy times amongst trouble and war, when they sat around the table eating dinner together. Yahiko seems to be the courageous one of the bunch, as he philosophises about potential solutions: "If there is to be peace, it should only come after they go through what we did! That's the true meaning of sharing the pain isn't it?"<sup>[13]</sup>. He never would've imagined how that outburst could lead to the development of such an organisation.

Nagato had been so compassionate in the past, and that guilt had kept him up at night sometimes, with one example being the rogue Shinobi he killed when he and Yahiko were attacked: "I became so frightened that I had gone

blind with rage and killed him! I know I did something wrong. I can't help but think that there must've been another way"<sup>[14]</sup>. Jiraiya tries to ease his worries, "you protected your friend ... so I believe what you did was the right thing. No one can fault you for that. Once you have been hurt, you learn what it is to hate. On the other hand, if you hurt another, you become hated, in addition to shouldering a sense of guilt. But it is because one understands such pain that generosity towards others becomes second nature. This is what it means to be human"<sup>[15]</sup>. This sort of bootstraps off of Yahiko's prior statements that universal awareness of pain does become a way for people to be more human, but it also exemplifies the *Jiraiya* from the Japanese folktale I mentioned many moons ago. He was a vigilante character and thus even an action like killing someone wasn't off the table.

Nagato mentions that Yahiko had to steal food from others if it meant he could feed him and Konan, which is where this strong urge to protect comes from. All he wants to do is repay those two, to protect them "no matter how much pain befalls me"<sup>[16]</sup>. Later however it is revealed that he would fail in that endeavour, for he had died a long time ago<sup>[17]</sup>.

All these losses forced him to grow up: "Master... you are merely human, but as I was mired in endless pain... I am no longer trapped within humanity"<sup>[18]</sup>. Initially sounding contradictory, it's referring to his ability to climb through the levels of hell described in the Wheel of Samsara, journeying from the lowest level - the Land of Hell (naraka) up to the Land of the Gods (devas). Seeing as he has experienced Pain at some point or another across the entire wheel means he should possess a solution for everyone, for we are all in Samsara.

Nagato explains his plan of gathering the tailed beasts, as they will develop weapons that have the capability to wipe out entire nations. By giving them back to the villages, they will use them - killing millions. Seeing the scale of

devastation each land would be forced to restrain themselves, out of mutual fear of annihilation: “This fear would give rise to the end of warfare. Conflicts would cease. Pain will force the world to grow up, just like it did for us”<sup>[19]</sup>.

This philosophy is taken directly from the effects of World War Two where the US dropped atomic bombs on Japan, and despite them being the results of relatively new nuclear testing, their power killed almost a quarter of a million people. Now we have newer generations, where a single one can be 3,300 orders of magnitude more powerful than the ones that hit Hiroshima and Nagasaki<sup>[20]</sup>. We live in a time where we don’t want war as that will lead to nuclear escalation, which then forces us to consider dialogical forms of peace, so Pain is right in a sense. But look at the world now. Wars will continue between nations where the threat of annihilation isn’t there, and only a small few have this immunity. Pain wants to give the weapons to every nation, so that they won’t have their integrity undermined so easily. But all this won’t guarantee peace, it just means we aren’t fighting to the death anymore, and all sub-problems will mount as there’s no understanding toward solving them, which will equate to the damage of nuclear strikes in the end.

Jiraiya looks a bit dumbfounded by his suggestions and laughs when he claims to be a pacifist God, but Nagato sees him as an insect, which may be the reason he’s only using the Animal Path. He manages to push through this level and proceeds to summon the two great sages, a couple geezer toads, but an even older geezer’s prophecy may be on the cusp of resolving itself. Jiraiya believes this is the “critical selection” he has to make - to stop his former pupil here and now<sup>[21]</sup>!

Nagato racks up the pressure, summoning two additional minions: the Human Path and the Preta (Hungry Ghosts) Path<sup>[22]</sup>. These are the realms

above the Naraka Path (Land of Hell) but the Human realm is the first one that isn't on the "evil" half of the wheel; the realm of humans is sort of unlike any other, in that you can go up in a single lifetime to the Devas and beyond, or down into the darkest Hell. It will be the actions of said person that will incur the corresponding karma, at a time when Jiraiya is hoping his decision is the right one.

If he can make it past these three then he shall move past the level of mere man and challenge the other Paths of Pain. But at the moment he knows that even with sage mode activated, fighting these three will get him killed<sup>[23]</sup>. He does have one trump card left though, which will be an incredibly powerful genjutsu based on singing to overcome all Hell. Listening to an old speech given by Terrence McKenna, he said that singing can get you through almost any bad psychedelic trip that would've otherwise been agony<sup>[24]</sup>, so just as Pain has weaponised Samsara, could this be the weaponising of the solution to pass through these realms?

The song executes as planned, and all three of them are paralysed and summarily taken care of<sup>[25]</sup>. The chances of seeing the Rinnegan appear are essentially zero and considering the coincidence of finding him during the war, it was hard to accept that he wasn't the harbinger of light: "For just a little while... I thought you were the one"<sup>[26]</sup>. He breathes a sigh of relief and walks away.

In letting his guard down, another Path sneaks behind him and manages to blow his arm off. Retreating outside again, he is accompanied by six Rinnegan wielders. The Pains he thought he had conquered are back, and look to be utterly unharmed by the last battle. Again he asks just "what is pain"<sup>[27]</sup>, to which Tendo says this is an alias that designates the six of them as a group. The totality of Samsara is designated Pain, to which the eyes are their ability to have transcended the cycles themselves<sup>[28]</sup>.

Managing to get away for a moment, he pulls in the Animal Path that started this whole thing into a barrier space and tries piecing together all that has happened. Yahiko was pronounced dead, and yet there he stands before him, but he wasn't the wielder of the Rinnegan... is this man Nagato? The crossed-out headband falls and a single scar reveals all<sup>[29]</sup> - the truth of what pain actually is has been grasped. All the times he has vanquished someone in battle, could it be that every member of Pain is actually a previous chapter of his travels? He has to check this out and see, even if it costs him his life. Now then, to run or face him, he's certain *this* is the critical selection he had to make<sup>[30]</sup>!

He sees them all and recognises their faces - "they're all Shinobi that I've encountered before!!"<sup>[31]</sup>. Everyone is here, except the person who helped shape the main character himself. The book was an adaptation of his life, a book which Nagato loved, but it seems he has decided to puppet around those bodies for the next phase of the work. The conclusion shall be imparting a kind of karmic justice upon Jiraiya, who is having to contend with all the actions he has done so far, and having to stomach Nagato's interpretation that his life has only brought about suffering - even his decision to help the Ame orphans as evidenced by Tendo. Now only Nagato stands outside it as the only one who can bring peace.

With consciousness beginning to fade, he's taken back to a cherished memory of him and Minato sitting at the table discussing his latest book. Despite sales being lacklustre he thinks it's great - so much so that he shall name his son after the protagonist, hoping he follows in his footsteps. Thinking about all those moments with Naruto again, he really is a lot like the main character. A lot like himself. "If never going back on your word and never giving up is your Shinobi way... Naruto, as your mentor and teacher, I have no business whining [...] I'm not gonna give up. That was

the true choice I was supposed to make! Naruto, you are the child of prophecy, I'm sure of it now! And the rest, I leave in your hands"<sup>[32]</sup>.

To see that he should've just followed his own Way, to never give up rings true not just in this moment, but across our Path as a whole. The same message as it was for Neji all those moons ago, and he almost slipped into Kimimaro's state of mind of changing his supposed destiny with the prevailing winds, as happens with losing your purpose. But this answer isn't just mere intel, it also asks of Naruto to push through all the Paths of Pain, as his way of perseverance is the right one! This was the jewel that Jiraiya had claimed for his efforts, realising the truth in his teachings and how Naruto just needs to keep forging ahead until he meets the individual.

## What am I supposed to do now?

After being stalled by Obito and having yet another failure, he receives the news that his mentor has died in battle<sup>[33]</sup>. Lord Fukasaku informs him that he went to the hidden Rain village all by himself to gather intelligence, and in doing so got further than anyone ever could in finding out who and what Pain is. He left a code that should unlock the secret of his identity, but lost his life in order to bequeath it to him. Right now Naruto cannot accept this gift as he is too embittered with the loss of his Sensei and scowls at Tsunade for sending him out. Deep down he knows he would've left anyway, as he's just as stubborn. Again, he has the same rage as he did on the very first mission he was sent on, mourning the deaths of those dearest and prioritising their safety at the expense of his beliefs about freedom and autonomy.

As he walks home, he thinks about the years they spent travelling together when he was a little furball with heaps of energy. He loved having Jiraiya by his side as he continued to grow older - "I wanted him to keep watching



over me... [...] But I only ended up showing him the worst, most uncool side of me”<sup>[34]</sup>. Iruka sits beside him and doesn't take his earlier rejection at face value, telling him how much Jiraiya had praised his student, “he was always boasting about you, saying you were like his own grand-child”<sup>[35]</sup>. It's a similar tender moment to when Sasuke's mother revealed how Fugaku expressed love and high regard for him despite his impression that he wasn't getting through to his father.

The next morning Shikamaru knocks and asks Naruto if he has any new ideas about how to decipher the code. He can tell he's still a bit down, so he tries to offer some words of wisdom: “Having lost my teacher too, I know what you're going through. But whining and sulking isn't going to make things better”<sup>[36]</sup>. He speaks on behalf of the village, in that he took action against the people that killed Asuma, though I question whether this is the same solution for Naruto. The loss of Jiraiya mirrors what Sasuke lost as well, as Kishimoto explains on this topic: “when Naruto lost Jiraiya, a father-like figure to him, he understood Sasuke's position for the first time. From there, what would Naruto do...?”<sup>[37]</sup>.

## Cracking the code - of nature energy!

Whilst looking at the problem with some fellow codebreakers, Naruto informs them that the ‘nine’ is probably Jiraiya's way of spelling Ta(タ) which is the letter that denotes the corresponding book - Make-Out Tactics. Pretty quickly they get the code: “The real one's not among them”<sup>[38]</sup>. For the moment the meaning is opaque, and whilst Shizune and Ibiki complete their separate investigations, this is the perfect time for some training! Lord Fukasaku tells Naruto to come with him, as it's time to teach the boy to master sage jutsu<sup>[39]</sup>.

This training is the continuation of his most recent improvements in controlling and integrating the malice that lies within, as he had begun to realise the onus is on him to take the reins of adulthood. Now he's learning the dynamics which explicitly counter the Nine-Tails, as he's learning to let the world in - "we animals can only appreciate and sense nature energy when we stop our own movements and synchronise ourselves with the flow of nature"<sup>[40]</sup>. We would see a clear shift in his perspective by the time of the war, as his fellow comrades were getting attacked by Madara but he was sitting in the middle meditating<sup>[41]</sup>! The old him would've lambasted this decision and whilst this is a lacking turn of phrase, he seemed to exercise "measured compassion" as he brought forth the maximum strength he could muster across time, which would involve using senjutsu.

This nature energy itself is equivalent to Chi or Qi, which is the fundamental energy of the universe described in Taoism, akin to Prana in Hinduism, or Pneuma in Ancient Greek Stoic teachings, with the latter two both translated as "breath". Chi can be honed through stillness and centredness, as well as exercises for mental and physical health like Tai Chi. Chakra as we see it over the course of Shippuden is known to have come from the divine tree and thus doesn't qualify as a *ubiquitous* source of energy, though this would be the correct answer in the first series. The energy centres in the body, called Tenketsu<sup>[42]</sup>, and the eight gates are closer to the Hindu system of chakras in the body whereby the energy released and directed is Prana. To add to the potential confusion was Sasuke saying in the Forest of Death: "my Chi is so out of whack, I overlooked a giant snake!"<sup>[43]</sup>, but this was used to describe the general state of himself in regards to all energies, not just chakra, so it's no wonder the term was summarily dropped after this chapter.

The idea of disturbances in one's energy persists though, as Lord Fukasaku cannot sit on Naruto's shoulders to supply nature energy into him as

Kurama is messing with his chakra flow. This is because he didn't want Naruto having another source of power contending with his own<sup>[44]</sup>, and his adversarial stubbornness has led to an impasse. He tries running and gathering nature energy at the same time, which is the definition of contradiction: "To gather nature energy, whose principle is stillness, while running ... it's like looking to the left when you're already looking to the right"<sup>[45]</sup>. Well why didn't you say so!

The majority of the inspiration for this section in regards to the training, toad symbolism and hermitage is based on the folklore of Gama-Sennin("Toad Sage/Hermit"), who is an elderly sage that lived in the mountains. Accompanied by nobody else but a giant toad he made a living by selling magic herbs<sup>[46]</sup>. His appearance isn't exactly flattering as he's depicted with skin covered in pimples and warts, which might be because he always lets a frog sit on his shoulder or on his back<sup>[46]</sup>. What this may influence is Jiraiya's distorted appearance when he is in sage mode, as well as the technical aspects of the jutsu requiring a frog to sit on the shoulders as well. Additionally, Gama-Sennin's ability to turn other people into toads may be the origins of sage-jutsu petrification, or it may be borrowed from earlier Chinese Mythology with Chang'e the Moon Goddess. I go more in depth into her story in later sections<sup>[47]</sup>, but what's important is her stealing the elixir of immortality from her husband Yi and ingesting it, turning her into a toad<sup>[48]</sup>. This isn't believed to be the right effects of the elixir but rather a punishment for bad behaviour<sup>[49]</sup>, which coincides with the distractions and temptations which pollute the mind and will transform Naruto as well if he isn't careful.

Now we're getting onto something psychologically important which is also linked to the origins of Gama-Sennin himself, with that of the Taoist Immortal Liu Haichan, who is often pictured with a toad on his shoulder, alongside gold coins and so forth<sup>[50]</sup>. He was a popular mythic figure during

the Song Period in China(960-1279) and played an important role in dispensing Neidan techniques alongside literature relevant to its implementation<sup>[51]</sup>. Neidan refers to "internal alchemy" and speaks to a set of practices that people can do to purify themselves in order to produce the "inner elixir"<sup>[52]</sup>. What's more, this is what Chang'e wanted to procure and stole, actually *squandering* its truest production, which is found in part by addressing the state of one's mind, body and spirit.

What often happens with characters like Gama-Sennin that are adapted and remodelled into Japanese folklore is that they don't tend to include this conceptual wealth of knowledge and spirituality as they're used primarily for artistic expressions<sup>[53]</sup>; here however Kishimoto illustrates Jiraiya's deepest desire is to eventually bring about great change to the Shinobi world, and whilst most of his books land on the naughtier side of things, *Tales of a Gutsy Shinobi* expresses his heart most clearly<sup>[54]</sup>. "Even I can see there's too much hate in our shinobi world. I'm always thinking that I want to do something about this hatred... But I'm not sure how to go about it yet [...] Well then, If I can't find the solution myself, shall I pass the quest on to you?"<sup>[55]</sup>. Naruto says "Yes Sir" in his usual upbeat way which completely plays against the gravity of his request, making him burst out laughing. In reading these passages, Naruto remembers those fonder times with his Sensei over those when he ran amok. He can picture himself in every battle, realising just how much of his nindo had been penned by his master: "As long as we live in this cursed shinobi world... there will never be peace. *I'll break the curse. If there's such a thing as peace I'll find it! I'm not giving up*"<sup>[56]</sup>. The character's name? Naruto. But whilst he's feeling warm and fuzzy about his bonds, at the same moment Sasuke is plotting to destroy Konoha and all it stands for, with a different snippet of Jiraiya's words arising: "once you have been hurt, you learn what it is to hate"<sup>[57]</sup>. This will certainly mean a battle of teachings is on the horizon, but that'll be between a different pair of sibling students.

# 14

## Pain

Back at Konoha HQ, Tsunade sees that the invasion is finally happening. Just as she orders the messenger toad to get Naruto, the elders walk in and demand that he stay at Mt. Myoboku. It does make sense from a practical standpoint, as all they want is Naruto; however at this moment in time we see that many high-ranking ninja have left to go out on missions, which means there isn't much stopping them from ravaging the entire village. After a small back and forth she grabs the elders by the scruff, dictator style, and tells them to sod off basically<sup>[1]</sup>. You old timers have had your day in the sunshine, you're senile and you lack faith, with a habit of applying archaic principles.

As she runs off to summon Katsuyu, Danzo hobbles outside, for he knew the elders would be too weak, and seizes his chance to kill the poor creature<sup>[2]</sup>. With Konoha destroyed he will probably get successorship due to Tsunade's failed idealism, and he mentions just this amongst his subordinates: "How fortuitous that this chaos has allowed us to escape Tsunade's vigilance. It seems the Akatsuki have their uses. The era of Lady Tsunade shall come to an end. But the Akatsuki wish to possess the Nine-Tails. So I have eliminated that possibility. We stay burrowed underground until things quiet down up above"<sup>[3]</sup>. One of his Root members says that's crazy as they need to make sure the village and the people aren't eradicated, but Danzo hedges his bets on Tsunade's medical prowess to avoid wholesale slaughter - all deaths being necessary for him to become Hokage presumably.

With interrogation of the citizenry not bearing fruit, Tendo hastens a guess that Tsunade will know where the Jinchuriki is, and this is the first time they have crossed paths since Jiraiya parted ways with them all those years ago.

“We will never trust anything you say, you terrorists who seek to destroy the peace and stability our predecessors obtained and have strived to maintain until now”<sup>[4]</sup>. Of course, she has only developed this understanding through reports, third-party references and so forth, and based on this hodgepodge of truths Tsunade will not interrogate or understand Pain further to see if she is correct. The genius of assuming the name ‘Pain’, allows one to see all the poetic irony at play for whenever a person tries to deal with him: “kill pain”, “take out pain” - how about “resolve pain”? But then again, Nagato thinks he is a God who can assume both the human and conceptual form of that word, but is he willing to change when someone attempts resolution?

He calls her arrogant and says her so-called peace brought misery and untold suffering upon villages like his. She counters, saying that Konoha has had its fair share and these are unwarranted attacks<sup>[5]</sup>. This was at roughly the same moment that intel was pulled from Shizune’s soul and he became aware that Naruto was at Mt.Myoboku, and he was about to leave<sup>[6]</sup>, but this aggravated him immensely... such ignorance cannot be ignored!

Pain thinks she has become lulled by peace and doesn't grasp the situation of other lands. Does she imply that every attack against the Rain was warranted? He retreats the other Paths so he can concentrate his energy into Tendo. The names of his abilities Shinra Tensei and Bansho Ten'in are amalgams of the phrase Shinra Banshō (森羅万象, literally meaning: All-Covering Forests and Ten Thousand Things), a Buddhist idiom which

has come to mean "All of Nature" or "All of Creation"<sup>[7]</sup>. Nature and pain are almost inseparable, intertwined concepts - but are they inevitable?

"Feel pain. Contemplate pain. Accept pain. Know pain. Those who do not know pain will never understand true peace"<sup>[8]</sup>. Stood high, arms outstretched over Konoha, symbolising his manifold perspective and beholding his creation: Pain sculpted this land in the beginning, now it is just the work of a more broad-brush inspiration. With a single move he pushes away the entire village, sparing the very outskirts, and Tsunade cannot believe it - "Unforgivable, unforgivable Pain!"<sup>[9]</sup>. In short, she said nothing to him which couldn't be reflected with a mere change of circumstances. The Rain has had equal amounts of power ravage their village for no good reason, thus it too must be unforgivable. "How dare you trample the jewel ... the dreams of my predecessors"<sup>[10]</sup>.

## I need a hero!

Through the smoke, and amongst the towering Ninja toads, help has finally arrived. Naruto thought the reverse-summoning must've placed him in the wrong location, but the Stone Faces prove to him he is in Konoha, although all they preside over now is rubble. Across from him yet again is the manifestation of his hate.

The fight begins much the same way as against Jiraiya, with the onslaught of animal summonings followed by the hungry-ghost path as before. Both are summarily stopped and he breezes through this stage with ease. This is due to *him* having the informational advantage: their linked vision, their singular ability per path, the nuances of the abilities in each Pain like the wait period for Tendo and so forth; Nagato however doesn't know all of his quirks, like the Frog Kumite hitting without a direct blow or his senjutsu chakra able to spontaneously regenerate. Nagato notes that he's using the

same techniques as Master Jiraiya, to which Naruto is shocked he calls him Master<sup>[11]</sup>. Sibling students ought to be able to understand one another, especially since they're both on a quest for peace. But this is no time for deep philosophical dialogue! Instead he goes straight for the jugular, telling him to shut up (twice)<sup>[12]</sup> before hurling a Rasenshuriken at him.

His recent training has definitely been good for stopping his affiliation with evil, as he has the ability to step up to the plate without the fox, but now he's distanced himself from demons altogether and refuses to speak with them. In this resolve it's no longer the case that some people who go against the village cannot be rectified but *anyone*, which means he has to accept he wouldn't have helped his former self. He is supposedly an adult now, and so that means throwing out the childish things he used to do like sharing his thoughts with his opponents.

Being alone for so long and doing things to get attention birthed the start of his character as the trickster - a cheeky, charismatic figure that could play on the fringes of society, but he looks back on that part of himself as something he had to do<sup>[13]</sup>. Naruto has to realise the strengths that come from developing that side to him and how it can aid in his goal for peace.

What's more, the archetype of the trickster has from its earliest conception been paired with the symbology of the saviour, like the Alchemical figure of Mercurius, with other commonalities like their shape-shifting and pranks on others seeing embodiment in Naruto<sup>[14]</sup>. This is due to the trickster experiencing diverse cross sections of reality like that of the shaman, who is the healer capable of rejuvenating stultifying societies. Jung notes that this is in part due to experiencing agony of the body and soul, becoming the "wounded wounder" who is the agent of healing, and the sufferer that takes away suffering<sup>[15]</sup>. So as we see, Naruto rejecting his prior self based on it being wrapped up with the shadow of Kurama has in turn separated from



the very pain that made him understand others, breaking from the very nature of the one who can bring peace<sup>[16]</sup>.

I think the root cause of this problem, for him and Nagato, is that both are reading *Tales of a Gutsy Shinobi* as a *literal* work meant to resolve the world, and being that fiction isn't "real" their attempt to exemplify it literally has caused more problems than before. Pain has dug up the characters and ordered their corpses around to continue the story, but there is a massive difference between copying the protagonist word for word, action by action and embodying what he's actually fighting for. Additionally, consider the fact that Naruto is embodying a simplified narrative of Jesus by choosing to fight the Six Paths by himself, for who else attempted such a thing - "Naruto is fighting Pain [...]?! All by himself?"<sup>[17]</sup>. Jesus in fact was offering his eyes and ears, his body as a vessel by which we come to understand each other hence the eating of bread and drinking of wine in Communion as accepting his offering. We don't actually drink the blood of Christ, we register the deeper meaning.

## The beginning of the end

One Path after another has been taken out, and three have been finished by the time his first allotment of sage mode expired; despite the hungry-ghost Path being revived and sapping away at his chakra, Naruto sees this as the perfect opportunity to stay still enough to allow chakra to build up quickly, with the overload of nature energy turning the penultimate Pain to stone<sup>[18]</sup>. This is truly the farthest they have ever been (almighty) pushed, so Tendo wastes no time in beginning the same Crucifixion process he performed on Jiraiya, spearing a chakra rod through both his hands.

Now the hero and the villain can have their classic mutual exchange of ideas, and whilst initially reticent to talk he may as well ask "What are you?!"

Why? Why are you doing this?!!”<sup>[19]</sup>. Pain tells him that the reason isn’t always apparent until you have the benefit of foresight, and the ability to see the forest through the trees. “My goal is to fulfil the dream even master Jiraiya was unable to achieve... as I said earlier - to create peace and bring about justice”<sup>[20]</sup>. Naruto is still disgusted and sees what’s right in front of him: “Peace...? Justice...? Yeh, right... Give me a break! You killed my master! And my teacher! Hurt my friends! Destroyed my village! You dare say peace after all you’ve done?!!”<sup>[21]</sup>. Naruto shouts that he will take down Pain and bring peace to the Shinobi world. “A lofty plan. And that would be justice. However, what then about my family... my friends... my village? Is it fair that you Konoha Shinobi who once did the same to me as I have now done to you, be allowed to spout all of this drivel about peace and justice?”<sup>[22]</sup>. If Naruto considers him equal, then he considers what happened to his village as wrong, and thus he has to accept it does qualify as the same justice as his. He would kill Nagato and destabilise the Rain once more, after the work that's been done to bring stability? Couching his language in virtuous terms doesn't separate it from the vengeance at its heart, though Nagato also accepts that “The justice I delivered to Konoha is no different than what you are trying to do to me”<sup>[23]</sup> and until he creates those weapons of mass destruction, he is no better than Naruto: “Right now, I live in that cycle”<sup>[24]</sup>.

Naruto thinks back to when he sat with Jiraiya, talking about how he would take up his master’s request to do something about all the hatred in the world, but right now - when he’s being asked - he can’t say he has anything. Does this mean he's failed? If he doesn’t like what Pain is doing to address things, but also has no way to stop the coming tide of conflict, what does he have as an objection? Moreover, might his dreams be just another trite exclamation like all the other idealists that have come before? He doesn’t know and stares at the ground glumly in a newfound understanding for his opponent. His shouting stops.

“I am going to show the world true pain... stop all wars with the terror that pain will inspire and lead it into stability and peace”<sup>[25]</sup>. Naruto knows this is just intimidation, but Pain retorts that humans evidently aren’t smart enough to master any other form. “After several decades, that pain too will eventually fade with time. Its effectiveness will diminish and humanity will begin to war once more. This time, they themselves will use the Bijū weapon against one another and reconfirm what true pain is. And then peace will be restored again, for a time. To create these short periods of peace, through pain, that interrupt the endless cycle of hatred. That is my dream”<sup>[26]</sup>.

It is upon those final words that we finally get to see the actual mastermind behind all this: the withered, emaciated man who seems to be between this world and the next. He can’t let go of all of Master Jiraiya’s ideals and has the hope that peace may come, “but in this cursed world, a peace where people truly understand each other is nothing but fiction”<sup>[27]</sup>. This obviously takes a jab at the book his Sensei and sibling student so admire, but he delicately avoids contradiction by specifying his peace doesn’t allow people to understand each other, it just renders them inactionable from the use of nuclear weapons.

Naruto has now heard the first story. The story of Pain. The objective retelling of the passage of history, and the general solution that shall deliver change. Coming out of such hard times, his views of human nature aren’t the most hopeful, and thus having to start with dark axioms you get dark answers. Nagato has equated the living characters in the book with his reanimated puppets because all the living can do is react to the pain that beholds them. When he needed to replace the animal path, he had a Rain Shinobi carry the girl up to the tower for Rinnegan and chakra rods to be implanted. In other words, the eyes which see and register pain, and the rods which respond to it. Nothing more than stimulus machines. To

implant these into Yahiko as well implies him dead is just the same as his friend alive all those years ago. He caveats it by having him be the Deva path, the one which holds wisdom and knowledge.

He drives more chakra rods across Naruto's back and legs, which prompts Hinata to jump in. She knows she can't save him, but maybe she can separate him from his Cross. "Why'd you come here?!! Run! You can't win"<sup>[28]</sup>. She accepts that this is a little selfish, but she wants him to know these words: "You helped me find my way and take the correct path, Naruto. I always chased after you, wanting to catch up... Wanting to walk together with you forever [...] You changed me, Naruto! Your smiling face saved me. And that's why I'm not afraid to die, defending you!! Because... I love you"<sup>[29]</sup>.

Made idle by Pain's actions, then his words, he was already questioning his own nindo and now he sees someone parting with the cold, impartial nature of Shinobi and expressing their love for another - his very dream, crushed. Years ago he was accepted as part of the village, with Iruka's words acknowledging him as an individual, but to be acknowledged is just to have a seat at the table without being chastised, to be loved is something which cannot be forced. When he finally feels the weight of Hinata's words, we see there is no elation, astonishment or confusion in Naruto's reaction, as he has absolutely no idea how to react<sup>[30]</sup>. Nobody has ever told him that before, and no matter how often he imagined what love could be, it doesn't compare to the real thing. Additionally, she represents the loss of pure innocence and the unfettered Will to cherish another, that which underlies both Pain and Naruto's striving, as Nagato says - "this is just like... when you Konoha Shinobi killed my parents right in front of me"<sup>[31]</sup>.

Naruto doesn't see the need to flirt with the Nine-Tails cloak anymore, with six tails spawning alongside the exoskeletal structure - an offering of his

body to the demon to be reborn through him. The necklace tries its best to seal the power away<sup>[32]</sup>, but he manages to grab hold of it and smash it. Now *this* is the jewel that has been truly trampled, for in it is the essence of the First Hokage and the abandonment of the Village Identity constituted in hope and dreams. He doesn't care about any of it anymore, now is the time to exact revenge... "In this state, he could attack anyone, none of us are safe"<sup>[33]</sup>.

## The Alchemical dissent

The breaking of the necklace I argue is not only a psychological break between person and village, nor just a religious experience - but an alchemical one. The reason I say this is because of the swathe of historical literature that equates one of the prime alchemical substances, the *lapis philosophorum* i.e., philosopher's stone, with the psychological and spiritual meaning of Christ. This pattern has been expounded upon by the work of Carl Jung in books such as *Psychology and Alchemy*, *Alchemical Studies* and so forth, which are the main sources of reference for this section.

As long as Alchemists have been practising, the primary realisation that in order to create the perfect physical material, the person performing the work (the opus) had to be equally pure and proper<sup>[34]</sup>, has stretched from Ancient Chinese teachings to the latest epoch of Western practitioners; to clarify and incubate oneself in the same fires as any crystals or rocks is paramount in being able to conduct experiments that ventured towards truth. Additionally, how Alchemists see the elements is congruent with the Shinto way of doing things as it isn't just the chemical amalgam but the symbolic one as well: if iron is Mars and copper Venus, their fusion is at the same time a love affair<sup>[35]</sup>. Nagato is not just a man but also Pain, and it is up to Naruto to see both sides and comprehend them alchemically.

Now that the jewel is broken, Naruto is going to have to develop it within himself, which is actually the best thing he could do as the lapis is a symbol of the self. What starts to happen psychologically is that one is inundated by the unconscious, oftentimes one doesn't expect an encounter, which can be so destabilising it causes psychosis. This battle against darkness is an alchemical phenomenon called the *nigredo*, which is a putrefaction of matter or blackening. Alchemists believe this decomposition is a necessary stage before the emergence of the Philosopher's Stone whereby one can turn any base metal into Gold<sup>[36][37]</sup>. This anguish develops the stone by making the descent into Hell, where the heat is so intense that the Hero loses his hair, and is reborn as bald as a babe. This fire is the *ignis gehennalis*, the Hell into which Christ descended in order to conquer death<sup>[38]</sup>. What's more, we see an incomplete descent in Naruto as whenever possession reaches a four-tailed state, his entire body is burnt in the process<sup>[39]</sup>.

This journey into the underworld is always something that has to happen to warrant eventual psychological and spiritual integration, but for everyone that actually goes there, they want to head into that darkness specifically, without this greater awareness that they're going to get out or that it shall be rewarding. That's what's so terrifying, as people don't have the foresight or the worry of what will happen to them - the consequences of being devoured are total disintegration of the personality and psyche. This takeover seems to have happened, for Naruto can only writhe in pain: "Why?! How did it come to this?! I don't know ... it hurts ... I hate this... [...] someone, please help me! Give me an answer!"<sup>[40]</sup>. Christ has lost himself for a moment, which is reminiscent of this famous excerpt from Chesterton's *Orthodoxy*: "When the world shook and the sun was wiped out of heaven, it was not at the crucifixion, but at the cry from the cross: the cry which confessed that God was forsaken of God"<sup>[41]</sup>. A moment of Atheism in the most assured self, from a man who knew that he had to make this sacrifice, but could still question it.

Now that Naruto is taking up the mantle of Shinobi hate, it is inevitable that he will face the incarnation of it in Kurama, just as the Devil began to assume his true form with the advent of Christianity<sup>[42]</sup>. Indeed, it seems Naruto doesn't realise the more he realises the peaceful, sagely aspects of himself the closer he will inevitably be to drawing out the equal and opposite force and have to confront it. Initially he was quite happy to accept the initial benefits of entanglement, namely the heightened recovery rate and strength, but can he accept its natural progression: "Destroy everything. Anything that causes you pain. Give me your soul. And I will rescue you from your pain"<sup>[43]</sup>.

Naruto must know that's impossible, but his eyes have seen red and the seal is beginning to leak out in the direction of the gates. Upon the eighth tail all that binding energy has dispersed, which also released Minato's chakra as a final measure to stop Naruto if need be. He catches him just in time as he had his fingers on the seal, to which he is shocked the Fourth Hokage just popped into his psyche.

"I didn't ever want to see you again Nine-Tails... But then again, I was looking forward to meeting my son as a young man, so I guess it all evens out"<sup>[44]</sup>. Naruto doesn't make the connection, and thinks he is going to see someone else, as this seal must've been placed by him as a measure to keep the Leaf strong against other villages. In actuality, he did it because *Naruto* is his son<sup>[45]</sup>, and whilst this is a happy moment, it's also a tense time for a reunion. He doesn't know whether to be mad at his father or not for putting this demon inside of him and making him live that life. Reductively speaking, if his nindo is that people shouldn't be treated like tools, but people that do treat others that way are evil - is his father not evil?

This was not his premeditated intention but something he thought he had to do based on what happened 16 years ago. Around the time he was born,

the Nine-Tails attacked the village and a masked man orchestrated it, and Minato believes he is also the one using Pain. "You're wrong! Pain has his own grudge against Konoha! He said Konoha ruined his village long ago!"<sup>[46]</sup>, but that's precisely what he's leveraging. It's also telling of what Naruto has believed in regards to Kurama: he couldn't have been used, for he has his own reasons to kill Nagato!

Even though there is a master-mind, and Jiraiya has given him the quest to find peace in this world, he just can't forgive Pain. He says "Lord Fourth... please tell me, what should I do?"<sup>[47]</sup> and evidently he isn't used to having a parent; "you have to find that answer out for yourself. For even I don't know it"<sup>[47]</sup>, and Naruto accuses him and Jiraiya of giving him this goal without any idea of how to accomplish it, that he isn't smart or a great Shinobi as his predecessors are and so on and so forth. But Minato ruffles his hair, and tells *his son* he truly believes he can find the answer, for that is the unconditional belief a parent has in their child. Someone is asking him not as a teacher or as a Hokage, but as a parent whose Will is just the continuation of that hope dating back to the start of the Leaf.

Having such a relationship with your family, and by extension your ancestral line, is to have access to the unfurling of history and thus the relief that life is not so opaque that one has to put it all on one's shoulders to comprehend. Tribes that haven't lost touch with the rituals and practices that connect people over the course of thousands of years have no sense of bewilderment and isolation that begets people in more recent social configurations; the animating spirit is still at their fingertips, guiding them along. Little does Naruto know he is already embodying the answer, and the next steps will be about making that journey rise up into conscious thought and articulating it.



Symbolically speaking, this is the journey of the King's Son, the *regius filius*, who is a rejuvenated form of the father<sup>[48]</sup>. It is up to him to restore the land and wade through the dark waters<sup>[49]</sup>. The King is an archetype which rises from the depths of the unconscious, and the son must respond to this call in the name of wisdom and salvation<sup>[49]</sup>, and just as Horus was the one to defeat Set and become the next ruler, it continues the work of his father Osiris in creating a prosperous Kingdom.

So as we can see, this fight is being fought on two fronts: the match with Pain, who spurred the descent, and the confronting of Kurama and being able to climb back out. Here we deviate from the standard mythological playbook as Minato, his father, actually tightens the seal and saves his son whilst still being in the “underworld”, which means we can be sure Naruto shall resume this descent in future to pull the King from the belly of the whale.

One final tangent I want to explore for the King's son motif is the etymology; the word derives from the Old English word 'cynn' - "family, race", or from a prehistoric Germanic word for “noble birth”<sup>[50]</sup>; people are torn by which one is correct, but it seems both are equally necessary to determine what the King means. To be born of a noble lineage is precisely one which has the richest connection down the ages, but remember what *we* know the King to mean - the awareness of every subsequent generation: that we act for our family yet unborn, for the families of our dear friends and neighbours, and their children’s children. It is a spiritual pipeline. If we syncretise all facets, the King is he who can hold both past and future in his mind when governing over his people.

What is *your* pain?

He boldly asks to be taken to the Pain Master<sup>[51]</sup>, but now we wonder whether he means the puppet master or the one that uses Pain himself; if only Naruto could see how far this message really went. Nagato is in no mood to talk anymore and tries to haul him back to the hideout, but he is quickly gotten the better of. If he won't generously reveal his location, he shall be found! Taking one of the chakra rods, he pierces himself and combined with sage mode which takes in energy, he can sense the direction of Nagato's incoming chakra.

Making his way over, he bumps into Shikaku, Inoichi and a few others who say they want to help him fight Pain. This moment could've been left out or swapped for other flashbacks, but it's meant to represent two things: the proof of Pain's words in miniature, but also how Shikaku mirrors his solution to their need for vengeance: "Let's let Naruto go on alone, [...] he's the one who stopped the Pains. I'm sure he's got something in mind [...] Let's put our faith in Naruto"<sup>[53]</sup>.

Isn't it almost contradictory that the very village he has fought so hard to save he now scolds? He's beginning to realise the problems with his prior foolhardiness, and neither he nor they would be acting in the spirit of the village if they were to do such things. Because the repercussions of their actions are just beyond the horizon of their awareness, they blame people other than themselves. It's not that Naruto now dislikes his own people, as he cannot forgive Nagato either<sup>[54]</sup>, but he wants them to stop causing more damage. In time he will find a way to get everyone to see what he's learnt today, and the answer he shall find will be one that reverberates across all villagers.

Taking his first steps into the tree where they were hidden, rage immediately starts to bubble, for Pain and the masked man are the two people that have taken everything away from him: his parents, his ability to

make friends, the reason he was given the fox, and the loss of every light bar his father's help. But now he can look at everything that would've pieced together a normal life and put it to one side, because he cares more about peace than the misfortunes of his upbringing. Speaking of which, he wants to hear Nagato and Konan's stories, to see how they could go from loyal disciples to fallen angels.

Nagato is intrigued and agrees, maybe now he finally has an answer for him. Despite wanting to lead a dictatorial and destructive global order, he is genuinely keen to know what other people have to say in regards to his philosophy and ethics, since he too wants to confirm he's on the right path. In causing all this pain upon Naruto, he hopes he cannot bring himself to forgive, thus proving his point, and even if Naruto has begun to grasp Jiraiya's teachings "that shouldn't change the fact that you cannot forgive me. Human love isn't so cheap that you can just sweep it under the rug"<sup>[55]</sup>. Maybe what Naruto should do is create an overarching theory of peace that factors in the necessary killing of these two as well.

That aside, Nagato starts his tale from the beginning, recounting the first of his two great pains: the loss of his parents. This was during the height of the Third Great Shinobi war when almost all civilians had left the war zone<sup>[56]</sup>, but not them - for they had nowhere else to go. Upon Konoha Shinobi breaking in, his parents tried to distract the enemy whilst Nagato got away, but they both died and he froze in place out of fear. He lashes out with the Rinnegan before collapsing, but awakens to find them both still beside him. There he began at the lowest level of Samsara, the Hellish realm, as one of the most horrendous pains a child can feel is the loss of both their mother and father.

Now totally alone and in search of food, he struggles to find anything and is on the cusp of death. To be clear, the Hungry-Ghost realm is a land of

addiction - but he is just trying to eat to survive; he walks and walks, knocking on doors but nobody offers him anything. He collapses in the middle of nowhere fully expecting to die<sup>[57]</sup>. But as if an act of divine intervention, Konan appears and offers him bread, taking him to Yahiko. Together they coordinate efforts to steal food from the market stalls, as "there was no system for helping orphans in that chaos-ridden small nation. Thievery was the only way for orphans to survive"<sup>[58]</sup>. This allowed them to go beyond the threat of starvation, and now they can begin to contemplate how to end this suffering, jumping all the way up to the Human Path.

"This world is about never ending war! I will rule this world and make it stop!"<sup>[59]</sup>. Seeing the loss of life all around him, Yahiko felt the pressure to provide an answer, and Nagato also took pride in the fact that he could find a solution so quickly - "I was able to come up with an answer right away. I just want to protect them, no matter how much pain befalls me"<sup>[60]</sup>. But by the time they were left to fend for themselves, that philosophy had shattered when Yahiko sacrificed himself - "it was the same as when my parents died. I realised then that the answer I had given Jiraiya was worth nothing"<sup>[61]</sup>. Over the years they had been given teachings which helped move them away from a forceful model into one that "was minimally based on military conflict"<sup>[62]</sup>, but after Hanzo had collaborated with the Leaf to eradicate them, he went back to his prior words about rulership.

Before Nagato could even think Yahiko had run into the Kunai himself and taken the burden off him, but it seems just as Hinata was trying to help Naruto, their sacrifice spurred the deepest hatred for all those who forced this to happen. After years of training, he had one of his eyes shown in the parting of his hair<sup>[63]</sup> which had illustrated his maturity, waking up to the power he was capable of; but whenever he is enraged both bulge out of their sockets, and he doesn't think twice about summoning the Husk of the Ten Tails - otherwise known as the Gedo Statue or the Demonic Statue of

the Outer Path. The reasoning for this name is in regards to the being that stands outside the wheel of Samsara and holds onto it. Yama, the Lord of Death, is the monster which represents impermanence. All things change and fade away, you might as well call him the God of entropy.

The Fourth Databook makes this comment on Nagato's resolve: "Using the same 'Rinnegan' of the Sage of the Six Paths, he follows the path of destruction. For the creation of a new world..."<sup>[64]</sup>. Judging from Konan's reaction saying not to use 'that'<sup>[65]</sup>, he has obviously summoned the Gedo Statue and wrecked havoc before, but did he take out the rods last time? It is unclear.

The consequences of that day brought a profound change to the Akatsuki way beyond mere leadership. Originally it was all about trying to understand people's pain and their group was the means of doing that, but people like Hidan are signs that the Akatsuki did a complete flip, as it became about *imposing* pain. In fact, each member of the Akatsuki represents an aspect of society on behalf of which they shall impose pain:

- Nagato, Peace.
- Hidan, Religion.
- Kakuzu, Money.
- Itachi, Clan.
- Sasori, Parents.
- Kisame, Government and Bureaucracy.
- Zetsu, Mother.
- Deidara, Art.
- Sasuke, Village.
- Obito & Madara, World.

You see this most clearly in Hidan, as the ways of Jashin are about getting people to experience shared pain which could bring people together, but

this completely collapses since the ritual entails the person's death whilst he himself cannot be killed. People that are going on a shared journey may experience pain along the way and shall certainly bond, just as Nagato got this idea from being with Yahiko, but the point of his organisation now is that they remain personal enough to have known pain with others, whilst impersonal enough that they have the ability to govern over you as we know how recluse both Nagato and Konan became.

## The culmination.

Nagato has told him everything, now it's time for an answer. Naruto can see where he's coming from and there were times even as recently as today where he could've been swayed to resolve things through Pain. But whilst he can't put it all into words just yet, he has seen the liberating power of belief. Not as a deflectionary tool or a method of ignorance, but he realised that if he cannot *believe*, then he will have to let someone else do the work of Naruto: "My name is a precious heirloom from Pervy Sage, I can't just give up and sully my master's gift"<sup>[66]</sup>. It may be that any action requires a non-zero amount of faith, for one could ask an infinite amount of questions and still be unable to motivate oneself. This is probably why Nagato peppers him with objections, all along the lines of how you could be so sure that you will never change<sup>[67]</sup>. Well, Naruto is about to change massively, from the boy who was hated by the village to being loved, "which is why no matter how much it hurts, I gotta keep walking... because that's who Naruto is!"<sup>[68]</sup>.

It is analogous in some ways to what he said to Sai before looking for Sasuke at the start of Shippuden: "If he tears my arms off, I'll kick him dead. If he tears my legs off, I'll bite him dead. If he tears my neck off, I'll glare him dead [...] Let Orochimaru try and cut me to pieces, I'll still find a way to bring Sasuke back"<sup>[69]</sup>.

In this moment Nagato's perspective changed from Pain back to his former self after seeing his forthright sibling student, as before now he had presumed Naruto was just the totality of his pain like everyone else i.e., Jinchuriki and nothing more. Phrases such as: "Time to tame you Nine-Tails"<sup>[70]</sup>, "Don't worry, I won't kill you. My precious Jinchuriki"<sup>[71]</sup> alludes to his reduction; even as he walked in and wanted to speak with him, Nagato said it was better if he just handed himself over - for Naruto was the 'invaluable jinchuriki'<sup>[72]</sup> which even caused Kurama to lose his temper. For a moment his eyes managed to bear both energies which resembled the Cross, but I don't claim that to be the reason we see it, though I would like to expand. It was fashioned by the Romans meant for humiliating people and maintaining social conformity, to appease the populous from following the example of Jesus by letting him die a slow and painful death. It was essentially the limit case of mistreatment by his people, and yet "the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again"<sup>[73]</sup>.

The key to all these developments have been due to Jiraiya's book, and whilst he had been clawing in the dark for most of his life trying to articulate his purpose, for once he surprised even Gamamaru: "I never thought two of Jiraiya's disciples would both turn out to be children of prophecy and both become leaders of a Shinobi reformation. Perhaps, in the moment when Jiraiya chose not to give up, all this became pre-ordained"<sup>[74]</sup>. Thus it could be said that with Naruto refusing to give up and to avoid the use of force, a new age of Shinobi had begun. "I gotta believe in Pervy Sage's belief! That's my answer"<sup>[75]</sup>.

The reason it took a fellow student to convince Nagato of his Sensei's teachings is because now he sees a hero exists - one who read *Tales of a Gutsy Shinobi*, inspired hope, and his name is Naruto! If we cast our eyes

back onto some alchemical wisdom, it seems he has sought to become *the page manifest*, as Naruto exemplifies the character in this book as a kind of secular analogue to being Christic by following Christ through scripture. But what is requisite for this transformation is having the Word become real, *verbum dictum et factum*, whereby we can sense it and touch it with our hands<sup>[76]</sup>. Now all this sounds very confusing as you can't be a living word, and yet Jung's analysis shows that contradictory operations, akin to squaring a circle, are one way of achieving the lapis<sup>[77]</sup>, and Naruto is after all the man who can look left and right at the same time.

He is also the one who solved the mystery of what the Protagonist must do, and this embedded narrative with the same flashback the two of them have had serves as a continuation of Jiraiya's initial talk with Nagato all those years ago<sup>[78]</sup>. This literary device, whilst somewhat rare, is a great way to not only concretise the essence of characters, but provide a space for dialogue around those critical topics. One great example of this is in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* in the chapter titled *The Grand Inquisitor*. The sub-story centres on the return of Jesus during the height of the Spanish Inquisition, for what reason it is unknown, but it causes quite the spectacle; one lady throws herself at his feet and asks that her dead daughter be brought back to life<sup>[79]</sup>. It is done, but he is summarily taken to prison to quell the chaos, and the ninety-year old Inquisitor enters.

He puts his lamp on the table and stares at him for a minute or two before speaking. He explains how he and the clergy have been trying to establish the Christian teachings across the world, and the Inquisition itself is the purging of all heretical threats to the Church to consolidate its authority. The last thing they need now is him returning with new teachings, new miracles and so forth and so he hopes he can understand why he's had to be put in prison. It is exactly like Nagato's attempt at justifying the persecution of the heretical remnants of Hanzo's clique, the centralisation of power and



authority in order to carry out Jiraiya's teachings, and now he is having to articulate himself to the Christ which listens solemnly.

During his exegesis of Christ's teachings, the Inquisitor mentions that during The Temptation he should've agreed with the Devil and turned stones into bread to stave off hunger, as mankind would've run to him like sheep, grateful and soon obedient, with the added bonus that they shall fear turning on Jesus lest the bread be rescinded<sup>[80]</sup>. After seeing the godly displays of Pain, the villagers of the Rain have become grateful for no longer being in suffering - surely he is the light-bringer?

He instils practicality and says one should feed a man first and then ask virtue of him<sup>[80]</sup>, which would actually come to be the sentiment of Naruto as well when he'd slip into a kind of megalomania. Convinced of his own power to stop the war, he said to Shikaku (in regards to Madara): "I'm acting first and maybe I'll try to talk to him after"<sup>[81]</sup>. That isn't what worked this time, since he could've continued fighting long after he had found Nagato.

"Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God"<sup>[82]</sup>, and thus Jesus describes the staple diet of a Christian, but the Inquisitor sees this principle and blames him for ignoring those of whom earthly bread will be their only consumption: "if for the sake of the bread of Heaven thousands shall follow Thee, what is to become of the millions and tens of thousands of millions of creatures who will not have the strength to forego the earthly bread for the sake of the heavenly? Or dost Thou care only for the tens of thousands of the great and strong, while the millions, numerous as the sands of the sea, who are weak but love Thee, must exist only for the sake of the great and strong? No, we care for the weak too. They are sinful and rebellious, but in the end they too will become obedient"<sup>[83]</sup>. So many of his points we get to see play out in this

moment, for Naruto knows that when he went off to see Pain to avoid killing him, he did it despite all the thousands of villagers that had died and only those who had survived the attack would see the necessary resolve itself. In the same vein, Nagato's sacrifice has meant he is no longer the leader of the Rain, and the Church has disassembled, thus forgoing the stability he took so long to cultivate.

His use of the Rinne-Rebirth jutsu is the attempt at slowing the wheel of Samsara and mitigating the ceaselessness of suffering. He believes in Naruto's vision where people can come together and understand one another, which shall mean a world that can address pain in a fundamentally different way that will reap rewards for the citizens of Konoha, Ame and beyond.

## Understanding has been reached.

Every now and again you need someone who represents the Will of Fire as such, so people can understand what it is they're passing down. It is both an indefatigably Japanese form of brotherhood, but also a common Christian allegory. As Fr. David Merconi writes, a piece of iron alone stands hard and resistant, but if we were to place it in a furnace or some other source of fire, it will begin to glow and take on new properties. Now malleable it can be worked into whatever the craftsman needs<sup>[84]</sup>. You can see that whilst Naruto has been able to revive the passion inside Nagato's heart there is also the possibility for manipulation to direct people for the Will of the craftsperson, to take that love, energy and hope for malign purposes. It is because of this exploitation that a sizable portion of watchers and readers have accused the Will of Fire of being nothing more than brainwashing, a means of propaganda that is only used by the top of the village hierarchy to continue its existence for the sake of the elders. Naruto hated this aspect of it just as much as everyone else, and felt it first hand. But if we are passing

the flame from one another, in a manner in which the flame isn't passing to person but *personhood*, then we get timeless progress. As people aren't just constituted by their relationships but by their independent integrity, it is this kernel of selfhood that struggles to be conveyed to another person. Passing the flame ordinarily would only continue separation; what is crucial is that one's mediating words and actions become the life-giving aspect of fire and not its destructive counterpart<sup>[85]</sup>.

This dichotomy will always persist as long as there is only one craftsman, but Naruto is assured of himself - being not just material, but the reified stone, the principled being that rests within everyone. He has this uncanny ability to change people because he brings them into the present, snapping them out of frameworks that are built off of trauma, war and hatred. It allows them to be in the Now by getting them to face fear and uncertainty, things which also come from inward contemplation, as Nagato says: "I wasn't able to keep believing in Jiraiya. Or even... in myself"<sup>[86]</sup>. It was due to his lack of belief that he regressed into believing in his eyes, as he didn't want to let his mentor down. "For master had told me that he wondered if the solution lay with my Rinnegan"<sup>[87]</sup> and "I just get the feeling that the sage's hopes were bestowed upon your eyes"<sup>[88]</sup> are moments that he probably thought he was the saviour because of them. In fact, when he does die I think he avoids giving Naruto his eyes because even with the strongest visual prowess he couldn't see the answer, whereas Naruto could; what's more, when he was given Shisui's eye, it was *his heart* that he wanted to primarily pass on<sup>[89]</sup>.

Now it is the villagers which get to offer him just that, and everyone in the Leaf has come to greet the golden boy. From the crucifixion, to the resurrection, to the ascension, he is thrown up high and cheers roar for the previous outcast. When he was carried by Kakashi to greet them, once he saw just how many people had come, it's the second time he simply didn't

know how to react<sup>[90]</sup>. It's fair to say today has been quite like no other, and the anime does a great job of showing how people like Ebisu had gone from their initial hatred to having a great deal of affection for him, as Naruto's continual efforts had chiselled away at their presuppositions.

### Can you read my mind?

Nagato was right about one thing, two people cannot understand each other if they don't understand the pain that sits between them, and even then it isn't guaranteed. In losing the village and gaining it, in losing one teacher and seeing him revived, in losing a friend in Gaara and being reunited, he has not only had bonds but could comprehend what it feels like for all of them to be severed. Likewise, Sasuke is rapidly approaching an understanding of Naruto despite neither of them knowing the shared narrative they have experienced. The tables below are not exhaustive lists of their journeys, since this is about articulating the equal and opposite challenges, revelations and so forth, but by the time they see each other again in war, all it will take to renew that bond is for both of them to show what is in their heart to the other.

Sasuke: <i>Naruto</i> (First Series): Direction: Top-down	Naruto: <i>Naruto Shippuden</i> : Direction: Bottom-up
Pain of losing clan, brother, family, love	Pain of losing village, teacher, love
Becomes an Avenger	Becomes a Sage
Awakens Sharingan	Awakens Senjutsu transformation
<i>Enters Forest of Death. Meets Orochimaru.</i>	Jiraiya dies. <i>Enters Land of Toads</i>
Fights Yaroi, <i>Restricts curse mark</i>	Fights Kakuzu, <i>Restricts fox</i>

Trains with Kakashi	Trains with Kakashi
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fights Gaara</li> <li>2. Fails to kill Itachi, <i>all these years have been for nothing.</i></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fights Itachi</li> <li>2. Fails to rescue Gaara, <i>all these years have been for nothing.</i></li> </ol>
<i>Leaves village, Trains with Orochimaru</i>	Trains with Jiraiya, <i>returns to village</i>

Then we do the inverse, using the remaining moments to see Sasuke travel into Naruto's past.

Sasuke: <i>Naruto</i> (Shippuden): Direction: Top-down	Naruto: <i>Naruto</i> (First Series): Direction: Bottom-up
Fights Naruto	Fights Sasuke
Fights Orochimaru, uses ruthlessness and hatred	Fights Gaara, uses friendship and acceptance
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fights Itachi</li> <li>2. Curse mark is rescinded</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Seal rescinded by Jiraiya</li> <li>2. Fights Neji</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Obito revelation about the mission</li> <li>2. Will destroy the village, kill the elders</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mizuki revelation about the decree</li> <li>2. Accepts the village and Iruka</li> </ol>
Attacks Gokage summit	Spray Paints Hokage faces
Fights Naruto	Fights Sasuke

# 15

## Danzo does it

The village is under reconstruction, and Tsunade has released pretty much all her chakra in summoning Katsuyu to aid as many villagers as possible. Being comatosed isn't where we do our best work, so we may need a change of leadership. An emergency council meeting is called with senior members of Konoha and the Land of Fire Daimyo. There are talks of raising funds and rebuilding infrastructure, but there is one other pressing matter at hand, the only important thing in Danzo's case: "the selection of a new Hokage"<sup>[1]</sup>.

The elders quickly back him up and accuse Tsunade of letting the village get destroyed. He is about to put his name forward when Shikaku jumps in and suggests Kakashi Hatake for the role. There is a nodding of heads, as he has the lineage and "big names" of Minato, Jiraiya leading his tutelage but there are some doubts due to his lack of experience in senior village roles. Danzo goes on the attack: "It was the Third's teachings that led to this current crisis! The Akatsuki leader that flattened our village was a former disciple of Jiraiya's. The result of Jiraiya sympathising with other lands and lending them battle strength! [...] And that generational softness allowed our ally the Sand's betrayal and Orochimaru's operation Destroy Konoha, the rise of the Akatsuki and now the surviving Uchiha, Sasuke, has gone rogue and is engaging in underground activity! What sort of Hokage is necessary in such times?! Someone who can clean up this mess, reform the Shinobi world and enforce Shinobi laws... The Hokage should be me!"<sup>[2]</sup>.

Despite Shinobi culture having its problems of internalising massive amounts of grief and stoking hatred, Danzo wants to push it further as it's a

necessary force: if we can just get rid of the emotions which plague our Shinobi and hamper their ability to perform missions, then that will restore order. Now is the generation of punishment, strict laws and the abandonment of diplomacy with the use of Machiavellian power dynamics. In torrid times an extremist leader's rhetoric lands on many more attentive ears as they hope for quick fixes, and the Daimyo entrusts Danzo to clear up the village, appointing him the Sixth Hokage<sup>[3]</sup>.

He didn't mention a word of Jiraiya's own disciple having the strength to defeat Pain and bring all the villagers back to life, and his teachings having nurtured the Jinchuriki who once resented the village into someone that will give everything to protect it, going beyond the port of call compared to Danzo's Foundation. He was far too condescending in regards to the efforts of the Leaf, seeing as they did take out Sasori, Hidan, Kakuzu and now Pain - what have the other lands (like your favourite "blood mist" village) done as none of the Akatsuki died by their hand. Knowing what we know now about the history of that organisation, it was actually Danzo's meddling which birthed the current Pain, and if he had the same knowledge of events as we do, it would seem he's angry at the consequences of his own policies and to remediate them, adds more fuel to the fire.

## Two modes of Governance

Danzo is head of the Root, and the concept of root and branches goes way back to at least the ancient Chinese texts on government and political order. One of which, the *Huainanzi*, tries to articulate the perfect socio-political setup, made so they say by the perfect ruler. He isn't meant to be a dictator, in fact he is dubbed 'the Sagely ruler' who cultivates the Root in themselves and has government officials as the branches, which repeats for all lower levels. The naming for this section is because the frameworks and explanations in this book can be interpreted in two ways.

In the first you get Naruto's ideas, and in the latter you get Danzo's. Take the snippet that implores the ruler not to waver by one degree, to be stoic and resolved<sup>[4]</sup>. This can be interpreted either as Danzo ruling with an iron fist and never cowering to the flaccid, lifeless teachings of Hiruzen, or Naruto refusing to sway from *Tales of a Gutsy Shinobi* for otherwise it would be a different book. In both cases there is one absolute centre of resolve which they shall not secede... whether this point causes contention down the line is another matter.

Danzo actually holds a lot of beliefs which are irreconcilable with actual peace, as first he avoids emotions like the plague because other Shinobi villages are constantly vying for short-term power grabs, and he will do whatever it takes to make sure his minions uphold all their critical intelligence. He doesn't believe that other villages will cooperate in any form whatsoever that isn't to expand their own interests, so we must play such games otherwise we lose out. As a result, he becomes implored to use the same trickery against his own people, just in case. To hide one's tracks, conceal one's sources, so that your own subordinates cannot guess your next move<sup>[5]</sup> is from a book called the *Hanfeizi*(c.240 BC), which reads much like Machiavelli's *The Prince*.

It is essentially the Bible for a school of thought called Legalism, of which all the writings are geared towards solving a single problem: how to preserve and strengthen the state<sup>[6]</sup>, which is funny since it's happy to forgo legal principles if it means the state is preserved. Unlike Confucianism and other belief systems it spoke solely to the ruling class, with no real interest in ordinary citizens inasmuch as their lives didn't impinge the rulers. As a result, it didn't really care for culture or customs, and there is no mention of morality being prioritised whatsoever<sup>[7]</sup>. Here we are starting to see what represents Danzo exactly: morals are secondary and coincide with whatever ruleset arises after addressing any potential uprisings. If it threatens the



sovereignty of the ruler, then it jeopardises the state and thus it is a crime against the people. There's a reason Mao Zedong championed the ideas of these ancient legalist scholars when he was a student<sup>[8]</sup>. It all goes back to how Danzo sees people through the lens of utility: even nefarious actors like Orochimaru have potential, since he can give him a way to greater power through Sharingan implants, Senju abilities, and a method of usurping the Hokage's position. There are never friends or enemies, there is only utility and the end goal.

I mentioned Machiavellian connotations, but there is already an entire literature on amoral Chinese politics, called *quanshu*, which is a set of techniques one can use to usurp the rules and eliminate political adversaries<sup>[9]</sup>. The perceived political success of an enterprise is the only centre of concern, and all suggested policies are good when they can produce benefits, not because they align with moral standards<sup>[10]</sup>. Whether known as a bug or a feature, people who endorse legalism and elements of *quanshu* are extremely aware of citizens replacing their imperial position, and apparently the only reason that ministers don't assassinate their sovereign is because their cliques are not strong enough<sup>[11]</sup>. This is in all likelihood the sort of philosophy that Danzo had managed to infect the leader of the Rain village with, as the Akatsuki's rise in prominence could only mean one thing!

Such a life inevitably becomes stressed, paranoid and he has to juggle the consequences of not trusting his ministers too much whilst simultaneously needing the reports they provide, for otherwise his actions will miss the mark. In fairness to the *Hanfeizi*, one of the *Ten Faults* mentions this fine-line, because if you fail to heed your ministers when it's your fault, and you have a dogmatic need to have your own way, you'll squander your good reputation and crash the state<sup>[12]</sup>. What's more, we see Danzo make heavy use of subordinates and he's perfectly happy to take routine mission reports

whilst going to the Gokage summit<sup>[13]</sup>. It shows he never tunes out of that mode and has to worry about threats to his life constantly.

A Legalist state also tries to radically simplify the problem of a diverse citizenry with the functions of punishment and reward. *The Two Handles* is a section that details this dyadic nature of mankind, speculating that we only respond to these two forces, though this machinery isn't something the ruler is subjected to. Their self-rule is what causes a fundamental asymmetry in the village and thus there is no distribution of the Village Identity to everybody. If you thought the dream of becoming Hokage was unlikely under Hiruzen's type of rulership, there's no chance you can get there under Danzo without becoming a puppet and a shell of your former self.

Despite a framework with much to be desired, Danzo remains popular amongst Shinobi purists and has a reputation as the knowledgeable elder who has the Leaf's interests at heart. For Konoha to survive the threat of foreign states, it has to have the capabilities to win wars, which means it has to have a populous willing to die - and nobody is going to die for an indecisive, weak leader. But in addition, if people start regarding themselves as more than tools the ubiquity of sacrifice will fade.

Many kids in the Shinobi world go through this phase of joining Danzo and needing hardline intervention, rigid structure and direction so as to embody this ideal of self-sacrifice. Kakashi, Yamato and Itachi are some of the names who have joined, and because troubled children have come to Danzo and become strong and reputable Shinobi, he thinks maybe this training should be used for as many kids as possible. He has a knack for getting people to alleviate their agency to him because their love for the village supersedes their need to be recognised for helping. Seeing Danzo's

quick and momentous strokes of change illustrates that he's doing something.

But despite his work in sculpting the symbol of the Shinobi savour, the people that have an affinity for him come from very dismal backgrounds, and he himself has equal reluctance to delve into his past beyond superficialities. This is a crucial problem, as the state of the consciousness of the leader will reverberate down and affect the mind of their nation. There is a story in the *Huainanzi* that talks about different Kings making their preferences known to the populace. If one admired narrow waists, the people cut down on food and starved themselves. If one admired bravery, the people put themselves in danger and risked death<sup>[14]</sup>. It shows that a ruler has to be careful, and such things should be absent - part of the job really is being a shadow.

Ordinarily it was the Samurai who had a Shogunate that enforced the nuances of government control, but in the *Naruto* world this is replaced with the Ninja way of doing things - but then the "Ninja" aren't very covert, as one Musashi Kishimoto explains: "From the start, I was supposed to get far from the traditional ninjas, dressed in black and living in shadows. This kind of thing has been seen countless times in mangas. I wanted them to be seen. Well, they're supposed to be hidden. But *Naruto* doesn't do that, he shows up in front of everyone, he gives his name to people ... Unlike usual ninjas, he likes to be seen and noticed. Then his blond hairs and blue eyes make him seem like a foreigner, not what you would expect from a ninja"<sup>[15]</sup>.

This was due to Kishimoto wanting to play with the idea of the individual contrary to the laws of the Shinobi, and now *Naruto* has figured out the character which will encompass this reformation - the Sage. This is a man marked by moral autonomy, listening to his own heart over the opinions of

others. He doesn't cower or take the lead from others. For the Sage, seeking within and understanding oneself are the most important qualities for the "morally perfected person"<sup>[16]</sup>

Naruto can see the potential dangers of his ambition and has grappled with doing things beyond the moral bounds of the current Shinobi code, as thinking for yourself can tread into ignoring rightful criticism, to "obtaining oneself" at the expense of others. The key to reconciling these aspects is to remember what being an individual means to Naruto. When a Sage rules, they place their priorities in nurturing the people<sup>[17]</sup> in a spirit-like way, and giving people tasks that their nature can thrive in. Thus it is said he manages the reins of government as if they were the silk ribbons of a dancer<sup>[17]</sup>. With this understanding comes the ability to combine many for any kind of endeavour: if you combine the strength of many to lift something, nothing can get in your way. If you collect the wisdom of many, there is nothing you cannot accomplish<sup>[18]</sup>. This is the heart and soul of Naruto's philosophy, and dare I say the entire anime, as reifying your individuality maximises your collaborative faculties, and vice versa.

For Danzo however, this ad-hoc organisation is way too complicated and frankly unnecessary. What's most important is having every Shinobi meet the minimum standard of a blank slate that can be used expediently for missions. But Sai shows something important, that no matter how much you try to cut someone down to the Root, it will still grow up again.

TnJ for Naruto, and anti-TnJ for Danzo.

Talk no Jutsu is meant to be a personhood expounder, whereas its antithesis focuses on using speech to stoke the attribute and properties in people. Danzo is a master of using fear and/or hatred, whichever causes

people to get into conflicts and factions that never pose a threat to succession. The anti-TnJ picks up where Naruto's former naivety left off, as it relies primarily on becoming a master of persuasion.

For both the Sage and the Tyrant this is one of the most important traits you can have, but they bifurcate based on how much they want to calibrate and systematise their speeches. We see Danzo's attempt at this whilst trying to deliver an impassioned sermon, illustrating the need to have him be the leader to fight the Akatsuki: "Just as the first Hokage once brought together his clan and created Konoha, now we must merge all the villages and create one Shinobi world. This shall never be accomplished through discussion and negotiation. Taking the time to do it morally and ethically will result in no change. And the Akatsuki will eventually destroy the Shinobi world"<sup>[19]</sup>. He does a good job of reducing the options down and ramping up the need for urgent action, tied with the coincidental loss of agency, but this doesn't win over the other Kage who have little trust in the notoriously tricky old man.

What trust was left evaporates as they find out he's used Kotoamatsukami on Mifune to sway the election, justifying it by saying results are necessary and he doesn't care whether they trust him<sup>[20]</sup>. Gaara hears these words and the image of his father rises, as he knows such things have been tried before to no avail. "If that's the state of the world, and of humanity, we have no future. If we stop trying to understand and trust each other, all that will remain is fear and terror"<sup>[20]</sup>.

But what is it that Naruto does which makes such a profound impact? Well, the *Huainanzi* coins the term "the sovereign expression"<sup>[21]</sup> which denotes that moment of breakthrough when you marry yourself perfectly to the context; we see such a thing happen when he spoke to Nagato, consciously reciting the exact words he'd said previously. It's his goal to speak to a

person behind their mask, as he wants nothing other than friendship with them.

You could say that mastery of this jutsu includes the possession of Shibboleths, which are a single word or phrase that proves to another person that you are part of their group, party, organisation etc. It is in Naruto's business to acquire them all and become the central node for which all previously tribal groups can congregate, though to use them to facilitate broader connection is not how they have been used across history.

For example, in the Biblical texts (the Book of Judges) the Gileadites installed a blockade along the river Jordan and would use the word 'shibboleth' to separate friend from foe, since the Ephraimites had no 'sh' sound in their language. Sadly, the use of a Shibboleth to distance, to sever - and even kill - was used in the last hundred years in Haiti. In October 1937, the then Dominican dictator orchestrated an operation to kill Haitians who had settled across the border. To distinguish them from Dominicans, the soldiers held a sprig of parsley at the end of their rifle or the side of their machete and forced the individuals to say what it was. The word in Spanish is 'perejil,' but if you're not a native speaker it's practically impossible to roll the 'r' sound, which cost them their lives<sup>[22]</sup>.

Ultimately, there is no dial to change the way one converses from an attributive to a self-to-self basis with another, so for anyone attempting to resolve through dialogue it will be a perpetually delicate dance until it isn't. Naruto cannot take shortcuts and "jump to the other side" so to speak, and the loss to Sasuke should've clarified the failure in getting him to return by force. The fact that he *does* have a motive with Sasuke will be the thread that constantly distances him. This inner conflict is what neuters any hope of Naruto actually connecting to him as a person, and he almost has to become a stranger before he can return to being his friend. He will have to

summon the courage to simply present himself and the Leaf to Sasuke as they are in the final judgement, as the most transcendental form of persuasion will be the truth in its unparalleled clarity.

Naruto didn't mention a word about the village to Sasuke during their last fight, and what's more he lets him leave the Leaf right after! The reason being is that it wasn't about literally bringing him back within village gates as his younger self presupposed, it was about returning to the spirit of the village.

## Pain, the driving force.

A letter from the Raikage has come, demanding that the issue of Sasuke Uchiha be resolved; this is right up Danzo's street as he wanted Sai to kill him, but that mission was unsuccessful. Upon hearing the news that he has been branded a rogue Shinobi to be disposed of, Naruto was about to storm into his office and have him change his mind, and he doesn't care if he's thrown in prison; but as Kakashi correctly deduces, if he starts going berserk he will tarnish his reputation of being village favourite.

Hard times create hardlines and the benevolence toward Sasuke has gone, but Naruto doesn't actually believe he could pose a threat to other lands. That is until he meets the Hidden Cloud ninja who bluntly tells him the facts: he attacked their teacher and they don't know whether he's dead or alive, all done whilst wearing Akatsuki clothing<sup>[23]</sup>. "We can't just sit around and do nothing when we have no clue what's happened to our sensei"<sup>[24]</sup>. Naruto sees they're just like him when he lost Jiraiya, and agrees to tell them everything he's got on the Akatsuki; for one, he knows they capture Jinchuriki alive so with that chance he will support their chase. This allows them to be a little more uplifted, but they still want data on Uchiha. Seeing that they will be persistent and explore any avenue for additional

information, things become tense as he refuses - “you’ve got to rescue your Sensei first”<sup>[25]</sup>, but this coddling can’t work. “I understand your need for vengeance! But if you guys hate enough to kill Sasuke, me and my comrades are not going to just sit around in silence. Eye for an eye! The vicious cycle will start all over again! People you love will keep killing each other!”<sup>[26]</sup>.

Karui counters and blames Sasuke for starting it all, and so by having him dead she believes this will stop her own suffering and avenge her Sensei. Omoi isn’t as dogmatic, but still he says of Naruto “Where do you suggest we take our hatred? How would you take responsibility for it?”<sup>[26]</sup>.

It’s been a while since Naruto had to fight so vehemently for his friend, and he’s no longer naive of the pain that family can give and take. He’s no longer the dogmatic protector of the group and can see that Bee is part of *their* family, but he hopes they can start by decoupling what they care for, their sensei, from what they hate - being Sasuke. He won’t sell him out, but this enrages Karui and she starts to bury her forearm into his throat, ironically shouting at him to say something<sup>[27]</sup>. Hurting random strangers for the vague idea that this contributes to your goal is no better than the person she wants to kill, but it’s not about wanting to be better or worse, it’s about getting even.

Naruto can’t seem to convince them of leaving Sasuke out of this, and he can’t stop them from exacting their revenge without fighting them, so he chooses to sacrifice himself. This causes her anger to reach its peak as the display of the moral high ground is an insult, and says “no amount of pummelling is going to make me feel better”<sup>[28]</sup> as the cycles of pain haven’t been addressed in her heart, so why resort to Christic sacrifice?

To answer that question, I will have to take a couple steps back and tell you about pain, physiologically this time. According to philosophers who



believe in the Imperativist theory<sup>[29]</sup>, pain is *directly* motivating. For example if I injure my ankle, those signals act as an authority to have me stop putting weight on it. Signals for hunger are an authority that gets me to seek food and so forth<sup>[30]</sup>. People can separate from this authority if a greater motivation is present, but what is most often the case is that we work with these signals to try and remedy pains or needs. For me to say pain is an authority is particularly fitting with our last opponent in his attempt at becoming the preeminent “motivator” for people to understand each other. But since then Naruto has tried to embody the polar opposite dynamic, not inflicting any pain at all unless he absolutely cannot avoid it. We see he has no motivation to respond to pain at all because of the fear of spreading suffering.

People that have no impulse to mitigate or respond to their own pain are said to have *pain asymbolia*, whereby one recognises the phenomenon but is completely indifferent to mitigating or stopping it<sup>[31]</sup>. They don’t have that instinctual combative response or try to avoid someone hurting them. This is where someone like Hidan is an interesting case study, as he has no need to resist pain whatsoever, and when Izumo and Kotetsu stab him in the sides during their ambush he doesn’t flinch or attempt to alleviate it. Moreover we could say the motivating factor and the phenomena are decoupled. Now we see Naruto doing a similar thing, letting the cloud Shinobi beat him up and take their anger out on him as he won’t try to stop them despite the large amount of pain he feels.

Asymbolics like him are said not to react because they no longer care about the condition of the physical body, losing the capacity to respond in whatever way is relevant to pain<sup>[32]</sup>. He could be said to have greatly reduced responsiveness, but not *all* for if they tried to kill him he would be motivated to stop them, but only because he wants to stop Sasuke - not out of his own priority for himself. If he were to die here this would massively

drive up tensions between the Leaf and Cloud with the high likelihood of war, and thus his pacifism might ignite more hatred than their previous back and forth.

This moment also highlights one of the fundamental ethical questions in Christianity, with the dichotomy of non-violence versus self-defence. Naruto's earlier words of an eye for an eye are taken straight from Leviticus, "And a man who injures his countryman as he has done, so it shall be done to him; fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. Just as another person has received injury from him, so it will be given to him"<sup>[33]</sup>; there are two reasons why its teachings have been referenced, the first being that it represents part of the Old Testament, of which certain teachings in regards to diet, agriculture and morality have been "superseded" by the New Testament and the life of Jesus. This is the idea of Supersessionism, and in this case Naruto has used the teaching in Matthew: "But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also"<sup>[34]</sup>.

Naruto is undertaking the development of the New Covenant, and we have sly proof this is the case with the codename that Danzo used(Kanzo) when collaborating with the Rain to squash the Akatsuki. It may be in reference to Kanzo Uchimura(1861-1930), the Christian Evangelist and founder of the Non-Church movement. It was formed from his dissatisfaction with the Church's mission and believed that a Christian life could be perfected without things like Communion or Baptism. The Church was obviously appalled by this and sought to suppress his views<sup>[35]</sup>, and it was in much the same vein of reformation the Akatsuki had dreamt of, and now Nagato has passed on the torch to his sibling student to find a new set of teachings.

The second reason Leviticus is referenced is because of its perspective of the blasphemer, and considers the Talion Law(equal consequence for the

criminal) the solution. If the community does not put such a reprehensible person to death for the crime of murder, then the impurity generated by them is said to be the cause of destruction for the community<sup>[36]</sup>. You could say that from the perspective of the village they have to kill in self-defence<sup>[36]</sup>. This is the situation around Sasuke at the moment which Naruto has to grapple with, as the Leaf should've taken out the man who has jeopardised their national security, with people now ready to defend it with a religious fervour.

The talion law wasn't something that was to be implemented in full rigour by the populace however, for otherwise you get people plucking each other's eyes out - in the spirit of the Uchiha perhaps - which is why Naruto is concerned that Sai has gotten involved. He can see Nagato's words coming to life, "I just want to protect them, no matter how much pain befalls me"<sup>[37]</sup>, but now it's closer to being "no matter how much pain I *cause*, I will continue to protect my comrades".

For his nindo specifically, how do these revelations affect the way he sees the power of the individual? Can the individual *pass* justice? We look at Shikamaru's revenge against Hidan for some clarification, as he said just before the rocks started to bury him: "your God right now isn't that stupid Lord Jashin or anyone else. It's me, and I'm passing judgement on you!"<sup>[38]</sup>. He says he follows the Will of Fire, which seems to be the secular analogue of God, whereby its followers can seemingly hunt down people even though the Hokage might not always give orders. A life for a life, and it was off Shikamaru's own back: his planning, his craftiness, that manages to enact justice. This is one of the dangerous avenues that Naruto's initially optimistic view of Humanism could lead to, and it won't always be such a clear case like the above example; look at the extent to which it is embodied in Sasuke, as he believes *he alone* can pass justice, and will destroy Konoha since his late brother's life is more precious than the village.

Things are beginning to ramp up, and Karui threatens to punch Sai for stepping in, but Omoi can see she will go too far, stopping her himself. With the fight simmered down Sai patches him up, and Naruto thanks him for stepping in even though he told him not to<sup>[39]</sup>. He's seen the damage of desiring to cause pain, but desiring to stop desiring to cause pain has rendered him equally subjugated. He's paranoid about not getting used by it, remembering his conversation with Minato when he said "the masked man" was the one using Nagato, but ironically Sai thinks the same way about him. He's read a couple books on recognising emotions and seen how Naruto behaves around Sakura<sup>[40]</sup>, and has placed too much weight on their friendship being the influencing factor. He thinks Naruto is doing this in large part because of the promise he kept and tells her his thoughts on the debilitating effect it's having on him, resembling that of a curse mark<sup>[41]</sup>. This is Sakura's ultimatum, believing that Sai is right, and will try to use love to steer Naruto away from this pain.

## Revenge at all costs!

At the Gokage summit, we see the clash of two hard-iron Wills in Sasuke and Ay. The former no longer cares about his previous moral code, as Suigetsu notes he's just hacking down any Samurai that get in the way<sup>[42]</sup>. In his short exchange with the Raikage, we saw Ay's stubbornness in continually attacking him despite his arm being covered in the Amaterasu, and he would've lost his leg had Gaara not intervened, becoming equal to the black flames which won't stop until their target is incinerated<sup>1</sup>.

He's willing to go that far because he thinks in very simple terms as evidenced by his conversation with Naruto: "Shinobi ought not to lower

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<sup>1</sup> This move can also be seen metaphorically from Sasuke's perspective as he coated the Susanoo in the black flames, which connects to what he said about "hatred inside darkness cannot be eliminated"<sup>[43]</sup>. It is a defensive psychological measure for anyone who would dare try to see the pained soul within, getting burned for trying.

their heads so easily! Action and power are what Shinobi respect!”<sup>[44]</sup>. When Naruto was demanding that the Raikage cancel his disposal he buried his head into the ground and tears ran down his face, showing the return to the outpouring of emotion. He doesn’t have time to hear his tale, or a second chance at conversation, he just doesn’t want to see anybody else turn into Sasuke and become steeped in revenge: “He’s obsessed with it. It changed him!! His vengeance became warped! And he stopped being the guy I knew!”<sup>[45]</sup>. So he does believe he has changed.

In Robert Greene’s book *48 Laws of Power*, the fourth law is *Always say less than necessary*. The reason being is that you will appear weak, common, and with little control, whereas if you shorten your sentences it’s less likely you’ll say something foolish. Moreover, it’s noted that one shouldn’t speak too much for fear of revealing your true feelings<sup>[46]</sup> which is incredibly illustrative of everything Naruto does as *anti-resonating* with the Raikage.

That Naruto has lost his ego means he has lost the concept of how he appears, i.e., how he frames himself. This is a psychological term which describes a cognitive bias whereby people decide on options based on whether they’re presented with positive or negative connotations. What’s more, Naruto has no idea who he’s speaking to, not in the immediate sense of titles, but in the sense he doesn’t know what the Raikage prioritises. Reputation is said to be the cornerstone of power<sup>[47]</sup>, and the Jinchuriki of the Cloud has just been taken, with Naruto being the only remaining Jinchuriki of the Leaf, so of course he wants them to stop the investigations - Konoha wants hegemony! “You bow your head for a criminal and beg for mercy to keep your comrades safe. That is not considered friendship in the Shinobi world”<sup>[48]</sup>. His reputation as a big and imposing leader has just been destroyed since the Akatsuki have taken his brother right under his nose and made him look a fool, and now there is this child who wants him to stop searching, in his view to stop *amending*. This is another reason why he

set up the Gokage summit, to reclaim his position and avoid letting the other Nations see his land as weak, by pressuring them with accusations of supporting terrorists.

## Sakura's dilemma

Sakura and the gang have come to take out Sasuke for themselves, but first they'll try their luck at quelling Naruto's worries and dropping his promise, which as we'll soon see was as doomed as Naruto's efforts toward the Raikage. In both cases there was a cursory understanding of what would be better for *them*, but not the ones they do it for, when they're the ones happy to sacrifice themselves just as Naruto did against Karui, to see their friends/family back.

During the end of the first series when Naruto took the burden of finding Sasuke off her shoulders, she initially thanked him, but at the start of Shippuden she was adamant about helping Sasuke herself. If he was someone she cared about and wanted to help, she wanted to be on the frontlines, so she must be able to understand why Naruto will refuse as well.

"Naruto... you can forget your promise to me... you can stop chasing Sasuke"<sup>[49]</sup>. And with his acquiescence the rest of the group shall kill him, leaving Naruto in ignorance. That is how they will repay him for saving the village. But you see, it is *for* the village they do it, anyone is expedient, even the Village Identity! For Sakura to withhold information from him takes him back to when he was a child living completely unaware of the decree. Moreover, she says she has stopped loving Sasuke because he has become a criminal and a nuisance, the very person he could've become with being a Jinchuriki and all.

The reason why some watchers and readers don't like Sakura, aside from Kishimoto's writing of female characters more generally, is because of moments like this where she's used as a punching bag for the moral lessons that we are picking up; for Naruto, the solution to his latest failure is here in this conversation - but why aren't Sakura words resonating with him?

"I can't continue to love a rogue Shinobi, a criminal. I'm not a child anymore, I can separate fantasy from reality"<sup>[50]</sup>, and she shall put on the appearance of the kind and loving partner, while robbing him of his goal. In making her way to the Land of Iron she must've picked up Itachi's playbook - a man who accepted disgrace in the place of honour, though that was on a completely different scale.

Frustrated that she couldn't find an avenue of conversation to change his mind, or find a way to tell him the truth, she turns and leaves, apologising under her breath for what she is about to try<sup>[51]</sup>. A clone of Sai's stays behind and reveals the reason behind her latest stunt, "Sakura smiled and said she would work together with everyone else ... but I could tell it was a false, forced smile [...] Sakura loves Sasuke so much [...] And I believe that it's because she loves him that she can't leave Sasuke to continue progressing toward evil [...] Furthermore, she's also prepared herself for you to resent her, Naruto. She considers it her atonement for forcing a lifelong burden upon your shoulders. Sakura has relied on you too much in the past. That's why she's trying to do everything by herself this time"<sup>[52]</sup>.

Just as Naruto's head is about to fall off, Gaara appears. He brings news that his friend has just attacked the Gokage summit, war has been declared and it is of top priority that he be protected: "If, as an Akatsuki subordinate, Sasuke Uchiha were to stand against us Allied Shinobi forces, I will not show mercy"<sup>[53]</sup>. He had thought what Naruto would do and tried to reason with him, but this shows the truth in something else: even if you have

experienced the same pain, held the same eyes, you may still not be able to share understanding. Gaara has long since branched away from the darkness, and what Sasuke seeks is rooted in the past.

The question remains, how to bring him into the *present*. It wasn't too long ago that Gaara was the main threat to his village, killing his own kind and growing to become an issue worthy of assassination too. And yet, Naruto could see what rested behind all that for they had shared the same *history* and thus he knew what darkness had sculpted those eyes. With what he knows now, it may well be possible for Naruto to inspire the same change in his friend.



# 16

## The Taka

Obito releases Sasuke out of the Kamui realm like a pitbull to fight Danzo whilst he gets the pleasure of watching. Seeing that there's no escape, the bandages on his arm are cast aside to reveal a grotesque assembly of Sharingan from the profits of genocide<sup>[1]</sup>. Now he wants to take both of Sasuke's eyes, the more the merrier presumably. But it goes beyond material gain when he asks "Is it true that it was on your and the other Konoha elders' orders, that Itachi Uchiha slaughtered my clan?"<sup>[2]</sup>, as now he does need to be taken out, just like that old mafia saying goes - he knows too much. "Itachi... he told you everything... with his dying breath, didn't he. It seems you alone really were special"<sup>[3]</sup>. On account of validating Obito's story, his hate envelops the Susanoo and its arm goes from bone to sinew, now a hand as real as his own.

Danzo sees this rampant escalation and says the truth about Itachi's mission doesn't matter to him, "You just want to destroy everything with your hatred. You are laying waste to the Uchiha clan's sacrifice"<sup>[4]</sup>, which is an appalling thing to say, as they worked to ramp up those tensions. What's more, Danzo's motive is clearly articulated within the *Itachi Hiden* novels: "cutting out the root of the evil that had been growing since the birth of the village of Konohagakure was Danzo's life's work"<sup>[5]</sup>. How ironic that he who desired the eradication of the Uchiha would be haunted by its spirit and crushed by the Susanoo, the spirit weapon of the Uchiha.

Since Itachi was a child, Danzo had been watching the development of his abilities closely and noted that his character was unlike that of his clan, and sought to understand his nature by asking the following: "Ten of our

brethren have been shipwrecked. One of them has caught a nasty, infectious disease. If he is allowed to live, the other nine will also get sick and die. If you were the captain of that ship, what judgment would you hand down?"<sup>[6]</sup>. He replied that his priority would be to save the lives of the other nine, and kill the one off. He smiles at this answer, for he knows he will be a very natural fit into his organisation, skulking back into the darkness. "Danzo believed the boy was the very person to fulfill his own dearest wish. [...] A trump card, to sever the link that had continued since the establishment of the village"<sup>[7]</sup>. His issue was how to get him under his control, ramp up the binary nature of circumstances, and have the decision to slaughter the clan be an inevitability.

"Self-sacrifice is the meaning of Shinobi. Never to see the light of day... distinguished servants of shadow... that is the true figure of Shinobi since ancient times. And not just Itachi, but many Shinobi have died so. This world could not function just on ideals and pleasantries. It is thanks to them that peace has been maintained. You who have misconstrued Itachi's Will may not understand. But Itachi, by revealing his secret to you... finally truly betrayed Kono-"<sup>[8]</sup> and he is turned into paint. Back in the first series, whenever Sasuke was at his wits end, he would have the story of Itachi rise up again and he would remind himself that he was an avenger and persevere. Whenever he needs a surge of energy now though, the story which floats up is the one Obito shared with him<sup>[9]</sup>, and this shall be his *modus operandi*. All his fraternal hatred was stripped away and replaced with love, but now they have become the logs for the flame of hate toward the village. His targets are any and all villagers who don't take Itachi's sacrifice seriously!

Those eyes on Danzo's arm speak of a history of clan members just living normal lives, possibly entering a coup or choosing to abstain, but now one by one they're closing as part of a dream to kill one of their own kind. The

Izanagi sacrifices the potential in one's eye to divert any misfortunes into a dream, to keep going in order to attain one's goal. The clan's collective dream of integration and normality culled for a single man's ambition to become Hokage. This is why Sasuke isn't slowing down, for this is the first time he's really seen Sharingan that weren't his brother's or Obito's, and this isn't what he meant when he wanted his clan to be right in front of him again.

These barrages are pushing Danzo to use one Izanagi after another, and in every interval he can't do better than a mutual strike. Sasuke has managed to keep this high intensity up long enough to drain him down to just one eye<sup>[10]</sup>. For the last exchange, Danzo pours the last bit of chakra into his blade and charges, but the sad truth is that he has been living in a dream within a dream for quite some time; the Izanagi sought to negate negative aspects of reality that befall him, but Sasuke caught wind of this and his genjutsu sidestepped his scrutiny, as all it does is convince him he has one more eye remaining. If only it were true, and even with all these get-out-jail-free cards the world has not fulfilled his dream; it turns out his days as Hokage were a mirage too.

He takes Karin as a hostage to help him avoid the use of his last and most precious Sharingan, and here we see Danzo's true self-aggrandisement, with Sasuke calling out his hypocrisy: "You, who extolled self-sacrifice... would take a hostage?"<sup>[11]</sup>. In one instant he says his life isn't that precious, but he is also "the reformer who shall change this Shinobi world"<sup>[11]</sup>. Sasuke must make a critical decision. Well, it doesn't seem like he needed to think about it very hard...

He says "one down, brother"<sup>[12]</sup> and speaks like Gaara when he would reference his own mother deliriously before killing people in her honour. Danzo thought he would have a chance at life by keeping a hostage, but if

he was in Sasuke's shoes he would've shot right through her as well. It seems he relies on people's good Will and moral compass to allow for his insane legalism to materialise, but upon seeing someone equally uncaring of human life he gets his comeuppance. Sasuke, who leads the Taka and has symbolic connotations with the Hawk<sup>1</sup>, is the one who takes out the Hokage in Danzo, the man that started the Hawk faction to take out Hiruzen! How poetic is destiny that he was the man who consciously refused to help the village when it was attacked, and berated the Uchiha as being responsible for the attack when they wanted to assist the Leaf. The Uchiha who he tried so hard to contain due to the fear he had of them killing the Head of the Leaf has happened, in one of the clearest examples of self-fulfilling prophecy.

As he's about to die, he has a flashback to the Second Shinobi War with Tobirama, Hiruzen and a few others who are about to be jumped by Cloud Shinobi and need someone to act as a diversion for their ambush. Things fall silent and nobody elects themselves. As much as Danzo is forcing himself to, he can't do it: "Sarutobi... What are you thinking right now? Are you prepared to make that sacrifice?"<sup>[14]</sup>. Even in his own self-analysis he is thinking about Hiruzen and whether he will raise his hand, and he does in fact break the silence and take on the challenge<sup>[15]</sup>.

Frustrated, Danzo yells at him with accusations of "hogging the limelight"<sup>[16]</sup> and all these other external factors: how he's perceived, what other people are thinking and so forth... everything but looking upon himself. He sees sacrifice as a Shinobi doing their proper duty, just as his father and grand-father did, but it seems so impersonal like a man who just throws himself into certain death because other people do.

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<sup>1</sup> The summoning animal he uses, Garuda, is taken from Hindu mythology and given to Indra for defeating the serpent Vritra<sup>[13]</sup>, so when Sasuke defeated Orochimaru is the point when he got it.

Tobirama notices this and says it isn't a competition to sacrifice oneself, and he has to reflect on the reasons why he refrained, and lastly, "do not bring in any personal conflicts"<sup>[17]</sup>; thus his Foundation eliminated all personality probably because of this day. His last words are directed to his lifelong friend - "Who and what am I to you?", which are the same last words when Karin was shot<sup>[18]</sup>, which shows that his ideals aren't dying with him, even though he tried to take the next generation of them in Obito and Sasuke to the grave as well.

## Paths converge

Sakura races to where Sasuke is and makes it moments shy of him killing his former teammate. Like everybody else with remotely acute chakra sensing abilities she notes his profound difference - "It's true. He's different now. He's changed"<sup>[19]</sup>. She uses the pretext of wanting to join up with him and abandon Konoha again to create an opportunity to stab him, but the fact she would leave the village irks him just as much as someone enjoying the peace - for that implies work like Itachi's wasn't good enough for her.

"Right now... if I stab Sasuke, it'll all be over"<sup>[20]</sup>. I'd have hoped it was that simple, but her wits didn't expect a counter as he went straight for the Chidori. Luckily Kakashi is here this time around to save one of his students.

In regards to the other one, he's racing to the same location with every sliver of advice running through his mind: Itachi's ultimatum, the Raikage's words and Gaara's<sup>[21]</sup>. Naruto's own friends, his village and now the collection of nations have universally rejected Sasuke and would kill him if need be, but he has to see for himself whether there is another way: "If I could just see him, I could figure out the answer"<sup>[22]</sup>. Naruto needs to see if Sasuke has truly changed into an unrecognisable demon by whom the

human spirit can really be lost, and he'll see whether he himself could've been lost if subsumed by Kurama.

After healing Karin, Sakura returns and will not allow Kakashi to be the bearer of the burden with one falling over the other to take responsibility for this stranger. She has the opportunity to take his back as he reels from the pain in overusing his eyes, but she cannot betray him - the blade inches away - "I thought I had made up my mind ..."<sup>[23]</sup>. As we see, she couldn't quite detach from her hope, and with Naruto's words of resolve later on "I still don't have to give up on my dream that one day, Cell 7 will laugh together again"<sup>[24]</sup>. That's what was in her strike, but Sasuke was ready to kill her, showing that their bond has in fact been severed.

Naruto makes it to her just in time, but as first impressions go he's fearing the worst. He attempts to remind Sasuke that what lies in the past is also the unity of Team 7, but his eyes are set on his first light; this is why Sasuke tells him he could never understand - "I told you before. What can you, with no parents or siblings, possibly know about me"<sup>[25]</sup>. But this is it, Sasuke, with no parents or siblings now, is starting to learn an awful lot about Naruto and whether he likes it or not this aspect of their shared pain is something he's grasped. Likewise, after the Pain match Naruto can say "Now I finally understand how Sasuke feels... what vengeance is about"<sup>[26]</sup>. Being consciously aware of his own actions and the path his friend has taken has meant he has crossed the gulf of ignorance and improved upon their detached acknowledgement in the Final Valley.

He is the first person Sasuke has come across who has made the effort to say "I understand the sacrifice of your brother" when his theory rested on there being nobody that could comprehend it. This exception is another reason why he is beyond infuriated and decides to desecrate the sanctity of his

brother's eyes, as he can no longer afford to go without them; his desire to have them implanted immediately is to crush Naruto into oblivion<sup>[27]</sup>.

In their first meeting as adults Naruto had said he wouldn't become Hokage if he couldn't save a friend, and he reasserts that point but with conviction<sup>[28]</sup>: he will die and take on Sasuke's hate before anything else. "I understand more now... why Sasuke has become obsessed with revenge and is causing so much damage. Sasuke really loved his family and his clan and I think it's because his love is so deep, it's hard for him to forgive"<sup>[29]</sup>. He's spot on, and that pain shows as Sasuke speaks with Kakashi, as he wasn't aware that his former teacher knew about his brother's secret, so when he said "I think you know the truth"<sup>[30]</sup> in regards to revenge, this outraged him for they are the ignorant ones: "you're laughing, at the cost of Itachi's life!! Laughing like fools, all together, completely ignorant!! [...] I want to change them to shrieks and wails!!"<sup>[31]</sup>. The father who once ignored him and toiled away as head of the clan, now Sasuke knows what he was up against and the tension spilled into his own family; the brother who never had time for him and always said he was busy, now he knows what he had to endure too. All these relationships have been digested through that history and now there is just bitterness towards the village.

What we know of Obito's words to Naruto and Kakashi back in the Land of Iron, we've become aware of the curse that has started since the Sage of the Six Paths and the hatred which has followed their ancestors. First we had the idea that those who came before could inspire and direct one through belief, hope and strength where possible, but he introduces the equal but opposite idea for Sasuke via a cosmic destiny and that their very actions are the continuation of the war between Senju and Uchiha, of Ashura and Indra.

“You cannot omit Itachi’s tale when discussing Sasuke”<sup>[32]</sup>, and this is what humbled Naruto for a second time. He wanted to believe it was all a lie, but then he really has no awareness of his own history. What if he knew of the targeted destruction of his own Land of Eddies, the fact the Leaf took his mother into the village and made her a jinchuriki and gave his family inexorable burdens as well. Now imagine he received all that information at once, and that his lineage *rewarded* hatred. For Sasuke, to see the sacrifice of his entire clan be swept under the carpet of history as one man’s insanity, and not the complex internal struggles between clans and governments is an injustice.

Their conversation in the TnJ space continues, as Naruto talks about his past as being a Jinchuriki unanimously despised by the village, with nobody getting past their ignorance to understand the harm they caused. They believed first and foremost in the village and if it told them to ignore the fox, then they would. If it told them to regard Itachi Uchiha as a criminal, then they would. It doesn’t mean they were reprehensible, as there was a moment when he understood why he could do it too. But, “once we really understand each other, your hatred will go away... just like mine did when I met Master Iruka”<sup>[33]</sup>.

“Naruto! No matter what you say to me now, I’m not changing! I’m still going to kill each and every person in Konoha, including you! So your only choices are either to kill me and become the hero who saved the village... or be killed by me and just be known as a loser”<sup>[34]</sup>. Sasuke’s retort is a weird mesh between his own hate and Itachi’s ultimatum to him all those years ago - either cling to life like a coward, or hunt him down and kill him.

In his final words to Sasuke he says they’re both still high-level Shinobi who can read each other’s thoughts with a simple trade of blows. On his way there he had wondered whether or not he’d know the answer to



helping him, but here he realises that combat still works as their primary dialogue. Since it has stayed true, it means a bond remains, and thus he adds - "Can you tell what I'm thinking too? You see right? That if you and I fight, we die"<sup>[35]</sup>.

This will serve as the real answer that Naruto provides to Itachi's earlier interrogation about having to choose between the dire options of killing Sasuke or letting the village be destroyed. He had wanted to test Naruto's resolve just as Danzo tested him when he was younger to make tough, cutthroat decisions in the time of a crisis. Would he pick an extreme too, or come to see the same as he: that he shouldn't have given up the effort so soon.

To keep pushing on despite the pressures of either side is to follow what Buddhists term "The Middle Way", which calls for a balanced approach to life, but not in the sense of passivity, as whenever you walk the Middle Way you exert continual effort<sup>[36]</sup>. It shouldn't be thought of as a compromise or moderate position either, as it manifests when you can reject the grounds of an entire continuum altogether<sup>[37]</sup>. He's able to use all this because that's what a *dialogue* is - it's part of his nature to allow for the back and forth, whilst also refusing to accept the villain's prospective solution of choosing between a rock and a hard place.

Initially, Itachi had asked Naruto what his obsession with Sasuke was, especially now that he had abandoned him and the villagers, but despite all that "we may not be blood but he's more of a brother to me than you are to him"<sup>[38]</sup>. Like Itachi, labels such as clan, family prestige and birth village mean little to him, but that wisdom is being properly used for the sake of connecting with others, not detaching from ramifications. This bond of selfhood didn't break during his questioning, so at least he can be sure that when he dies Sasuke won't be left without a brother.

## A turtle, an octopus and a waterfall

After Obito declared war on the Five Nations, each Daimyo has agreed to the allied shinobi forces and Tsunade gathers her council to begin organising resources, battalions, defences and more. Meanwhile in the land of toads, Lord Fukasaku, Gamamaru and Gerotora are deciding whether to store the key to the nine tails seal within Naruto or not. The Great Lord Elder says to “Summon Naruto Uzumaki here. I shall peer into his future and check for any prophecies. All decisions will hinge on what I find”<sup>[1]</sup>.

In Japan, divination is not so much the forebringing of information of the future in a manner of fate, but more like interacting with the lived potentiality. It speculated on what the future might hold rather than an absolute position<sup>[2]</sup>, and many people would take precautions against bad outcomes by enacting customs/cultural traditions that would please their family and ancestors<sup>[2]</sup>. The act of wetting your finger and lifting it up to see the prevailing wind is much the same sort of function, but this is the spiritual adaptation. Because Shinto is a polytheistic religion that primarily interacts with a range of spirits, there is no counterpart to the monotheistic idea of a God who has the intractable proceedings of existence. It is through the rituals and engagement with these kami that an individual acts with the spiritual, which is why fortune telling/divination plays a noticeable role in Japanese life as you can confer with different spirits in regards to starting a business, building a house and so on<sup>[3]</sup>.

What's more, dreams(yume) are given a special place in regards to omens, with intriguing examples given of animal messengers and treasure-boats being signs of good ones<sup>[4]</sup>. Moreover, this word of an octopus might

actually be a good thing for aiding Naruto in his journey. As for the second part, he's already aware of "the lad whose power lies in his eyes"<sup>[5]</sup>, as he was seen only moments ago.

This is quite poignant because in Ancient Greece the Oracle of Delphi was a source of foresight, divination and wisdom and as people prepared themselves for consultation, they would see the famous inscription etched into the temple wall: "Know Thyself"<sup>[6]</sup>. Naruto started the work of questioning himself deeply over the course of his journey and in clarifying his path has made Gamamaru's job a lot easier. It was harder to read Jiraiya and his subsequent students on the other hand, and the reason why he would write books wouldn't become clear either<sup>[7]</sup> until he could find the reason out for himself. The contrast between these two actually mirrors Pythia's readings as well, with her replies to the average person being mired in metaphor and obscure passages, but upon being asked a question in regards to Socrates, namely - "is there anyone wiser?" she replied sharply that there wasn't<sup>[8]</sup>.

The reason being can be gleaned from one of his students Antisthenes, who said that the greatest benefit of the Socratic methods and of philosophy more generally was "The power to hold conversation with myself"<sup>[9]</sup>. Now almost everyone has an inner voice and the profundity of this statement can easily be missed, but what we shall see in subsequent sections is Naruto enacting a TnJ against himself, so that he can know who and what he is.

## The Fox on my doorstep

The last dream was with Gerotora storing himself inside Naruto<sup>[10]</sup>, and so the key to the Nine-Tails seal will be right next to the beast. All he has to do in order to claim ownership of the key is place his hand on the central square and it will be up to the strength of his resolve to never allow the Fox

to come out. He looks reticent, and doesn't rush to make the deal, for he is all too aware of the consequences. If he gets into the same disenfranchised way as he did against Pain, he could release the Nine-Tails completely with no ability to tighten the seal as it may be undone.

The Fox's power is composed of its chakra and Will, and to control the beast "one needs to extract just Nine-Tails' chakra, convert it into one's own chakra, 'n thus make it one's own power"<sup>[11]</sup>; however, the problem is that the Will tags along whenever chakra tries to be extracted; "In short [...] one must have a strong Will of one's own, empty of hate, that can completely separate Nine Tails' Will from his chakra"<sup>[12]</sup>. Naruto's Will shall serve as the membrane, which is made more or less porous by his convictions.

The benefits of learning nature energy has mapped over well for controlling Kurama, as he had to develop an intuitive understanding of merging external chakra with his own without it taking over his body, which is only made possible by having a sound mind, swapping out the effects of petrification for the envelopment of hatred.

Minato's wishes of having a little bit of it continuously trickle out of the cage for Naruto's network to merge with it has succeeded, but like Naruto says this cabling has meant his heart could link to Nine-Tails Will all by itself<sup>[13]</sup>; in time we know this to be more nuanced for it is his dark personality that is entangled in his heart which serves as the hateful intermediary to the fox. But despite these risks, he cannot heed Yamato's advice forever for he is the Nine-Tails jinchuriki after all. He knows he'll need Kurama to fight Sasuke, but hasn't realised that more important than the chakra is understanding his hate, for in surpassing that he takes a massive leap in comprehending his friend.

## Turtle island

They set sail to the distant island that the Raikage had set aside and previously used as a training ground for him and Bee, and just as Gamamaru predicted Naruto would wind up on an island with an octopus in the fray. The island is itself a living turtle, and the fact it's mobile makes it the perfect hideaway not just to evade the Akatsuki, but should the Nine-Tails break free it can't jeopardise the war effort.

The world turtle is an ancient idea in mythologies across the globe, and cultures like the Lenape tribe in what is now Delaware US, saw the turtle as the symbol of life, earthliness and perseverance<sup>[14]</sup>. The sheer length of time that a turtle can live for expounds a kind of sagely wisdom which makes it an apt creature to use for the representation of the world. This couples well with Vedic Hindu myth, as the world turtle is seen as a symbol for one of Vishnu's avatars Kurma. Vishnu is the god of preservation/protection, and symbolically this turtle is meant to protect Naruto and Bee as they retreat from the carnage of war.

The world turtle has also been seen by Jung's introspection into Western Alchemy as coinciding with the *massa confusa*<sup>[15]</sup>, which refers to the chaotic and undifferentiated mass from which all alchemical transformation takes place (the *prima materia*)<sup>[16]</sup>. What is yet more interesting though is this comment made in the *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, where it's said the King must transform himself into the *prima materia* in the body of his mother, and in this return to chaos, where all is in conflict and repelling one another, is the dissolution that is prerequisite for redemption<sup>[17]</sup>. Naruto's time on the turtle is where he tries to resolve the inner-conflict between the two sides of his personality, and in passing that stage he meets his mother where he's reunited, and only then does he overcome the Fox.

His guide for this part of his journey will be an octopus in Killer Bee, and his tailed beast is based on the Ushi-Oni which is a composite Yokai of an Ox and a demon, specifically the head of an Ox with a spider body oftentimes. There are stories of it harassing fishermen at sea<sup>[18]</sup>, which is incredibly ironic since Bee actually helps the “fishermen” on the boat by saving them from the Giant Squid - proof that the demon has been conquered!

“Someone who not only has these beasts but even the Eight-Tailed Bijū completely under his control. A Jinchūriki, just like you, of eight tails”<sup>[19]</sup>. Naruto is shocked at this news and makes a Bee-line to his room, pun intended. He asks to be trained so he can find a way to control his own powers<sup>[20]</sup>, but upon the slightest reluctance he says things along the lines of “you’re a Jinchūriki too, so why aren’t you helping me?”<sup>[21]</sup> and throws their shared experience in his face. It’s a cheap way at avoiding an interpersonal conversation when it should’ve been what kickstarted it; his second attempt at persuasion sees him concocting a rap that somehow garners respect, and Bee offers an exchange of salutations: a fist bump. But it goes a bit downhill after he calls his shades suspect, like he’s a pervert.

His last-resort move is the harem jutsu which, if it did work, would surely indicate that he’s not the right teacher to have the knowledge to control a tailed beast; I guess Jiraiya was his last interlocutor with Kurama and he had women, money and gambling as some of his vices so Naruto presumed it wouldn’t be a problem. But Bee doesn’t have any real vices as through his hardships he developed an identity that doesn’t need crutches, perfectly happy going about his day crafting new music.

Naruto is still his impulsive and impatient self and runs to Motoi to ask him about the training drills/techniques that he used. If he won’t teach him then this is the next best thing. “I don’t care if he’s Kumogakure’s hero! He’s

mean and stubborn and keeps quoting weird rhymes! You'd think another Jinchuriki would understand!"<sup>[22]</sup>. Motoi snaps and is on the verge of losing his temper, but I don't think he realises either that Bee was just seeing whether Naruto gets that shared pain doesn't mean pain is shared, and rewarded him when he stepped away from that.

After hearing that Naruto had cleared the first stage, he gets taken to the training grounds and Yamato tags along. Now we're presented with the waterfall of truth where we sit and take a moment to reflect with our darker-side, which is the actual Jungian shadow that some have confused with the Nine-Tails. An implanted spirit is not the Jungian shadow, it's closer to a personification of hatred that has accrued across millenia and is representative of that element of the collective unconscious.

The Waterfall of Truth and the cave which sits behind it seem to be another incorporation of *Journey to the West*, as the hordes of monkeys declared whoever could pass through and make it to the other side would be their King<sup>[23]</sup>. Sun Wukong of course was the one who made the route back, but passing through the waterfall was really just a test of character to see if one could jump into the unknown as there weren't any enemies, which probably links to Naruto's second trial.

Here though crossing the waterfall does involve an opponent, Naruto's dark and embittered other half: "Why didn't you give them your autograph back at Ichiraku?"<sup>[24]</sup>. He makes the point that because he didn't, he must harbour some hatred deep down for these people who were perfectly happy to hate him a couple years ago. Now they want an autograph? Surely it is excusable to resent such people! When he says "I am you. I live in your heart"<sup>[25]</sup> it reminds me of Gaara's pain as a child, that he would clutch his chest and say this pain never seemed to go away.

Motoi doesn't understand the intricacies of the waterfall and says this half must be "defeated"<sup>[26]</sup>, though that isn't quite right. The reason Bee breezed through it was because he had addressed the anger and rage in himself as he wanted to become an exemplary brother for Ay: "I believe Master Bee strove diligently to become a worthy Jinchuriki for Lord Raikage"<sup>[27]</sup>. But, as much as Motoi respects Bee, he still doesn't have the courage to speak to him after what happened thirty years ago.

When they were both five years old they were good friends, until his father was killed by the last attack of the Eight-Tails. The council came to a decision and would extract the tailed beast from the former Jinchuriki, killing him, and sealing it inside Bee<sup>[28]</sup>. That rampage is what fractured their relationship, but now seeing that sickening power continue to be used despite the loss of his father made him resent their decision: "I assumed it would never be possible to control Eight-Tails, that there would continue to be mass casualties"<sup>[29]</sup>, so he took it upon himself to kill Bee and take the beast with him. He would watch him every day, and was appalled by the fact he could laugh and seem so nonchalant about harbouring that demon.

In turn, Motoi embodied the same facets as the other-half of Naruto: never forgetting pain, holding grudges and refusing to acknowledge anything else. It wasn't that Bee *didn't* care, as he took the time to bring flowers to Motoi's father's grave, but do you expect him to be sad all the time? It was that same self-expression and jovial nature which won over Gyuki in time. He tamed it through ambivalence to its roars, which is deeply Buddhist in nature, to watch its anger as merely a stream which runs by us, hence the waterfall was as natural as any other day.

Over time, and still watching, Motoi started to see the weight of the entire village's scorn and alienation would've driven him insane. "I came to realise that Master Bee's suffering was greater than mine"<sup>[30]</sup>. Here he shifted to the



other half of Naruto: one who could acknowledge somebody else's pain, and his story highlights part of the solution to bridging that divide.

Naruto hears his tale and goes away to reflect, with Gaara's story coming to mind as he used to be on the opposite side of the spectrum to Bee. Naruto's the one who had to crawl from one side to the other, but "I guess somewhere deep inside my heart... for sure... I'm not confident that I've got everyone's trust back home"<sup>[31]</sup>. As he mulls over a solution to his woes the tempestuous squid pops up again, grabbing Motoi who was on his way to check up on him. Bee comes to the rescue once more, and now he finally summons the courage to tell him the truth; "Oh yeah, you did?"<sup>[32]</sup> Bee smiles, and sticks out his hand for a fist bump.

Naruto heads back to the Waterfall and realises what he must do. To us his new autograph won't mean all that much, but what it illustrates is that despite everything he still wants to be with the villagers. With one outburst after another the anguish that is harboured in his heart comes out: "It was so hard... so painful! [...] You can't trust any of those villagers!"<sup>[33]</sup>, they're fickle for jumping ship and what's to stop them going back? Naruto can see that those who have reflected like Motoi have understood his heart, they sense the compassion he has for them, plus he has something rare after the Pain fight: another first impression.

Just like Bee's greeting to Motoi was the rekindling of their friendship, people are happy to come up to Naruto and start a conversation and get to know him. On this path is the chance for connection. Naruto doesn't deny many of his points, like "inventing stupid rules, making us outcasts! Don't you remember?!"<sup>[33]</sup>, and acknowledges that he got strong in part because he existed, but he doesn't want to live in the past anymore. To make positive change he'll have to believe in himself - "I need to trust the *me* that the villagers believe in"<sup>[34]</sup>.

At the start of their confrontation, despite how much Naruto had become acquainted with pain, he went on the offensive, but why? It was because he called this personality (a side of himself) a fake<sup>[35]</sup>, with any hatred he spouted as estranged and fabricated; for this “Naruto” however it is anything but equivocal. Whilst he’s a bundle of demonic and hateful tendencies, from his perspective what he’s doing is *just* - those villagers genuinely ostracised him and made his existence far harder than it needed to be. This personality only wanted to protect him, and despite being an intermediary he was on the side of Naruto primarily. He just wanted to be whole and thought that he was going to be abandoned, again, but Naruto outstretches his arms and says “thanks for everything... but it’s all right now”<sup>[36]</sup>. This resonates far beyond condoning hate, but embracing one for their foremost humanity.

## Raar!!

Time to walk through the waterfall and battle the Nine-Tails! In the grounds inside the waterfall are statues with no heads, symbolising those who had lost out to hatred and been decapitated by the statue<sup>[37]</sup>. These purification ceremonies<sup>[38]</sup> are all about testing the heart, the rest of the island was about testing one’s brawn.

The statue which you stick your head into doesn’t actually decapitate, and it has similarities to the Founding of the Khalsa in Sikhism, for the Guru Gobind Singh asked for people in the audience to sacrifice themselves for the Lord to show their commitment. Only a handful of people had the courage to walk into the tent behind him and confront the fact they would die, but they were actually given orange robes and decorated to walk side by side with him, now inaugurated as the Cherished Five<sup>[39]</sup>. For those who had the courage to do such a thing had obviously walked a path that had

made them tough, strong and ready to sacrifice themselves for what they believed.

They move into the final chamber which is a pure space that can handle the worst case scenario should it manifest. This is the arena where he may go to war with himself without the possible infliction of harm to others. Such things are what we need to allow individuals to really cultivate themselves against the pure evil which resides within, and he used this idea to a lesser extent when he was learning the Rasen-Shuriken.

He unlocks the cage and doesn't do too badly in the fight, but it turns out to be a completely different matter when taking on the symbol of hatred and not just one's own. He can feel the accumulation of so many generations of despair, anger, envy, jealousy all merging into one crimson sludge that covers him in a flash<sup>[40]</sup>. It's beginning to subsume him, but what force has caused it to stop half way?

## The red-hot Habanero!

His mother, Kushina. Naruto's initial guess is that it's the Nine-Tails trying to subvert him, being a master of illusions after all, but through a little conversation he sees that she says "you know"<sup>[41]</sup>, which pierces his heart and he realises it's Mum, dropping everything to hug and squeeze her.

Because she is an Uzumaki, she was brought by the Leaf to become the Jinchurki of the Nine-Tails as Lady Mito was about to pass away. As a child she didn't grasp all the politics for why this had to happen and was largely outside of that deliberation process. But in time both him and Kushina have realised that there will be many burdens, the majority of which we don't sign up for, and yet paradoxically they seem to get a little lighter when we add love. Beyond everything else they left him at birth, his parents had

hoped to pass on their ambitions and thankfully it worked; Minato had said just before completing the eight-signed seal that “To forsake one’s country... and one’s village... is the same as forsaking one’s child”<sup>[42]</sup>, which encompasses both his love and failure, for he loves with equal might the village as his own child, but in turn forsakes the personhood which sustains it.

As Kushina's chakra starts to fade, she apologises for forcing him to bear such things, but Naruto knows why they did it, and he can't stop smiling with the feeling that both his parents have always loved him. He is so glad to have been their child, and Kushina says she is so thankful that Naruto was born to them... they leave each other in tears, but getting to say what's most important - I love you<sup>[43]</sup>.

Symbolically, the mother isn't just connected to the process of birth but also *rebirth* considering the deep alchemical marriage to the underworld and so forth<sup>[44]</sup>. We see that the gates to the Fox on the one side had order, symbolised by his father, and now the gates have opened he has entered into the *massa confusa* and seen his mother. This is the typical demarcation, and the mother can either pour out love, to which the contents of the underworld are used to enrich and serve as ashes for the phoenix, or the mother becomes tyrannical and uses the same contents crushingly. Fortunately, this unconditional love is entwined with him and serves as the only thing which prevented his total annihilation. It's no surprise that Jung picked up on ancestral connection being another kind of psychological rebirth that enriches the personality as well<sup>[45]</sup>.

In returning to the match, he finds himself completely calm and content, after the acceptance he bestowed himself and the love he has felt from both his parents. The Fox is no longer such a terrifying entity, in fact it seems a little sad that he is this alone, so eager to make his cheekbones gaunt and

his body thin down to the ribs just to hurt him. But his efforts are in vain, and Naruto's newfound strength overwhelms him, blasting him away whilst latching onto his chakra, separating the two successfully.

He says "I promise I won't do wrong by you... so just hang in there, for a little while"<sup>[46]</sup>. His mission in regards to Kurama has been contextualised, as he's seen the efforts of his ancestors over the last century all trying to keep it in check, but he believes he can go a step further.

Seeing as we have covered the majority of this arc, it's about time to go over and piece together the lessons that are available. From Naruto's dialogue with Bee he had used the idea of shared history, which he comprehended from Sasuke and Obito a moment prior, to facilitate personable bonds, almost as if it could do the work for him. He will have to realise that there is nothing, no matter how far-reaching and rigorous, that will replace the human effort to extend his hand and spill his heart. For Motoi he had known Bee for three full *decades*, and all that shared history he kept welled up inside might've proved useless if not for Naruto's company. Upon meeting his mother, he gets to feel what is packed within that past: the feelings, the thought processes and so forth which contextualises an otherwise cold reminiscing; all this comes to the fore when one offers love to another - Motoi is the example he can become if he cannot continually show his heart.

Kishimoto has obviously written Naruto to be this gullible and to have him start right from the bottom in every new arc, to rediscover the truth of the lessons in the last adventure and how they are shaped in the next individual. He has to embody a kind of contradiction where his knowledge of others grows exponentially, but his conversations take no shortcuts or presuppositions either; thus a series of mistakes are expected if he wants to participate with the individual as there's a "mutual shaping" that should

occur if one is truly vulnerable. When conversing with his shadow, he categorised him as the demon, then the fraud and the fake, then the angry part of himself, until he could just call it Naruto.

## And now I am a saviour.

Naruto is eager to continue his “mission” and lines all the animals up to check whether they are male or female. During the process the world turtle flips, and he is beginning to suspect something is happening outside. Kisame’s shark had gotten away and relayed the coordinates of the turtle to Obito, which in turn allowed Kabuto to make the journey over.

The excuses for why Naruto must remain inside gets increasingly tedious, and it’s reminiscent of the young Buddha: kept in the palace and given simple tasks inside the walls of peace and tranquillity; however he too grew restless and wanted to see what lay outside. Naruto makes a dash beyond the waterfall when he is met with a group of Konoha Jonin, one of them being Iruka Sensei<sup>[47]</sup>. He tries to tell a lie about some bogus creature that has Nine-Tails chakra which may pose a threat to him<sup>[48]</sup>, but classic Naruto doesn’t care about such things and wants to face it himself, with the guards trying their best to stop him.

With sage mode activated he feels the effects of the war that’s in full swing<sup>[49]</sup> and can no longer be coddled. Iruka had tried to affirm the orders given to him by the village, by which he used his love for Naruto to lie to him, but this is exactly what he had realised was wrong in the very first chapter of the series. Thankfully he drops the charade and comes clean, moving from the helicopter parent to the trusting parent. He says that Madara’s war is about taking the Bijū and they’re aiming to protect them at all costs as they’re critical to stopping total catastrophe beyond the Shinobi world. This war is about keeping them safe<sup>[50]</sup>.

Naruto has never been one that delights in having comrades do all the work in protecting him, especially when it is his “fault”. He remembers one of Nagato’s quotes: “wasteful death, eternal hatred and pain that does not heal. That’s what war is”<sup>[51]</sup>. Now he gets it, and this is the next stage for him in the symbol of what *Naruto* is to face. “I will face eternal hatred, I will face the pain that does not heal! That’s my role!”<sup>[52]</sup>.

When he accepted himself and consolidated his personality a moment ago, it seems he also rendered it under the name of *Naruto* the saviour, producing this latter complex; he told his shadow “you need to be me”<sup>[53]</sup> but does he not see how he can become Obito so naturally? In losing the ones he loved and accepting Madara’s philosophy, he said “everyone will eventually become me”<sup>[54]</sup> and regressed to nihilism; his plan of performing the Infinite Tsukuyomi where “all shall become one with me! And result in a complete possession form that unites all”<sup>[55]</sup> is *his* form of love. Thus we can be sure there will be at least one more echelon to climb.

Putting that problem to one side, he outfoxes Iruka and the rest of them to head off with Bee and break the barrier. Their attempts have unanimously failed, and it was a slippery slope for the village to embody the tyrannical mother image - the world turtle becoming a prison rather than a resort.

This archetype tries to have the son return to that undifferentiated unconscious state, but for the Logos within the Hero this is the primal sin, evil itself<sup>[56]</sup>. Therefore the first act of liberation will be a kind of matricide, as the spirit that dares all heights and depths must suffer enchainment on the rocks of the Caucasus<sup>[56]</sup>. This is my summary of Carl Jung’s comments in regards to the Hero and The Mother image, which emphasises the Will to be free and escape from the protective womb. Additionally, this reference about Prometheus and the adamantine chains is the same treatment, with the same chains, that Kurama the trickster got from

Kushina<sup>[57]</sup>. She represents the positive image and rallies behind Naruto, beckoning him to follow his dream, embodying the nurturing spirit that goes beyond a superficial love for her child.



# 18

## Tests of character

Bee and Naruto make their way to the battlefield, with the latter still using his Kurama Chakra Mode(KCM) whilst journeying - and he's scalded by the Nine-Tails for doing so. "I've been inside you, watching you, for a long time... But you're still naive, Naruto"<sup>[1]</sup>. He does seem to have an annoying air of swagger to him, saying he's busy and they'll talk later. Brushing him off as he thinks everything he says tries to weaken his resolve to take over. Possibly. But there are concerted questions that he poses to him: "Do you really think you can end this war all by yourself? It's not possible. Unless you want to borrow more of my power"<sup>[2]</sup>. There's the classic bargain again, but still: "If your comrades are killed, hatred will arise from their deaths. Are you planning to defeat all of the enemy before that happens? Then again, if you take down the enemy, they'll bear you hatred. Do you really think you can take all of that on yourself? You'll eventually end up seized with hatred like Pain Nagato. This war will bring you closer to that place"<sup>[2]</sup>. He must be delusional or plain stupid if he thinks that he can fix all that.

Kurama is sure that war, the catalyst for all hatred since he has been alive a thousand years ago, will continue and this child won't break that loop, he has no idea. He couldn't even help a teammate. He reminds him of their first fight as children, when he lost and saw Sasuke's eyes: they weren't looking at him, but through him - trying to point out that he hasn't been considered since day one, with any kindness shown by Sasuke to be an exception. In fact this is the consensus now as Kakashi highlights when he saw him after the Danzo fight: "it is the history of repeated, accumulating hatred that has created the Sasuke before us"<sup>[3]</sup>.

Even so, from Sasuke's perspective this doesn't imply a loss of agency as he doesn't believe he is working with Obito because he doesn't *accept* that he is<sup>[4]</sup>, and yet his actions say otherwise; likewise Naruto says he is going to tackle hatred and yet his actions recently have been those of extraction, imprisonment and disinterest - in regards to Kurama. He gets value from him in the same way that Sasuke was seen to use the Taka.

## You shall not pass!!

Whilst on their way to the battleground he sees the Raikage accompanied by Tsunade. Ay doesn't butt his words and says "We are here to stop you! You will not pass!"<sup>[5]</sup>. Gandalf is pretty rattled that his brother has been an accomplice and supporter of Naruto's idea to escape.

Trying to run past him doesn't work as the Raikage matches Naruto's top speed to a stalemate. Ay says there's nobody faster than him now that the Fourth Hokage died. Minato was a great man, but "with all his power, why do you think he is not here today to help stop this crisis? Because he under-estimated the danger of the tailed beasts! You are his son. And you have learned nothing from his sacrifice?"<sup>[6]</sup>. The Raikage has chosen to offer his interpretation of Minato's death to the child who had his parents convey in great detail the terror of that night. No doubt this annoys him, and he says his father didn't make any mistakes. It wasn't such a simple affair that Minato was weaker, but Ay only renders that day from a power-scaling perspective.

Things get increasingly heated and the Raikage says he will kill Naruto if it means that Obito can't execute his plans in the near future, as it takes time for Kurama to return to life<sup>[7]</sup>. He has much the same sort of ideas as Danzo, doing whatever it takes to help his village, and if push came to shove he would even kill Bee. The reason he chooses to kill Naruto is because Bee

has full control over his tailed beast and can use Bijū bombs<sup>[8]</sup>. Tsunade says he can't make that sort of decision without consulting the rest of the Kage, but bureaucracy takes too long and won't resolve anything in time! It must be done now whilst he has Naruto in front of him.

When someone becomes a Jinchūriki it is thought that they sign away their Will and exist as a relation to the Shadow: "they belong to their nation and village to keep the balance of power"<sup>[9]</sup> and they'll have no say in the matters of the world. If the commander of this war says they aren't participating then they shall not! Bee intervenes and says "you kill him, you kill me and eight tails too"<sup>[10]</sup>. He implores him to read his soul and go back to their first meeting.

Before Ay was Raikage, they were looking for a partner<sup>[11]</sup>, and only Bee seemed to be compatible as they could match their strengths to perform the double-lariat. From that point on he was known as his brother. They go on missions, and the flashback slows to a campsite with Ay and Bee sitting with the current Jinchūriki, discussing the next person to take on the burden of Eight-Tails. He talks about the grief it gives him and the difficulties of having even close friends look at you differently once it's been done: "Even if they think you're still the same, well, that's not true"<sup>[12]</sup>. But why would that be, says Ay, as aspects of ourselves persist through change - such as "ninjutsu, skill, ancestry, virtue"<sup>[13]</sup> and these were the reasons why he was chosen in the first place. He scoffs and says despite all this "You can never look back, only toward the future. But that future is filled with darkness and loneliness. Have you really achieved compatibility... if you walk through life with the shadow of your own death?"<sup>[14]</sup>.

"You think about it day in and day out until you become so consumed that you stop knowing who or what you are. It feels like someone's opened a hole in your heart. The Bijū uses your weakened heart to run amok"<sup>[14]</sup>.

Kushina explained this potential danger to Naruto briefly, and that “the key was to fill ourselves with love first. Then, even if we had to live as Nine-Tails jinchuriki, we could still be happy”<sup>[15]</sup>. The village keeping that bond spurred devotion, as we need someone we can talk to, play with, learn from and so forth. These attributes which Ay described do persist, but even though they are family he struggles to offer him more than superficial support.

With the transfer rapidly approaching, Ay tells his sidekick: “You’re about to become a Jinchuriki. Everything’s going to change. Your life is going to be very hard”<sup>[16]</sup>, but he basically says no sweat and he’ll take it in his stride. Ay wants Bee to know he’s very special to him, and so he shouldn’t need to hide secrets as he’ll be there no matter what. This care is one of the few things that facilitated him being truly strong, but does Ay know how much those little moments mean to him?

They go on to battle Minato in the Third Great Shinobi war, and the yellow flash acknowledges the young upstart for managing to “overcome being the Eight-Tails Jinchuriki to be your own Ninja”<sup>[17]</sup>. Minato can see that Ay still doesn’t understand what allows Bee to control it - it must be talent<sup>[17]</sup>! No, it is far more than that, but if he fails to recognise it then his brother will regress and may no longer retain what was once human.

Bee makes him remember those days: they’re the ultimate tag-*team*, and together they go into battle. If he retracts his care and support, that also means symbolically the Village Identity no longer trusts and accepts him, unknowingly withdrawing the real force that keeps him fighting - “I don’t live and fight just for village and nation! I live and fight for you, *bro*, too”<sup>[18]</sup>.

The Raikage abjectly refuses on the basis that there is no evidence they’re ready to go into war, they could jeopardise the entire world should they be

captured. But evidence presents itself when he goes at top speed to punch Naruto, but misses. Someone who is faster than he is, plus Bee who has even greater physical strength! This may just be an even greater tag team...

## Zetsu Infiltration

Back at the medical stations, there is a massive problem. Medics are being killed despite all the checks on chakra put in place. The suspicion is someone is being controlled as nobody would kill medics which heal the Shinobi of their own village. They have no leads and everyone is a suspect<sup>[19]</sup>.

This section explores another aspect of identity: how can we deduce upon first impressions whether a Shinobi is who they say they are and not a traitor? Well, in all proofs it takes time to evaluate and this temporal dimension is key. In the heat of war you can't exactly sit down with each person and draw out any inconsistencies, so this triggers international Shinobi platoons to segregate via their village, and then again into ever more specific localities so that each person can be verified. But not everyone will have their best friend/family member in the same facility to provide a series of pinpoint questions. In one of the tents Sakura told "Neji" that Shizune is treating Tonton, to which he asked "will Tonton be able to rejoin the battle?"<sup>[20]</sup> indicating he didn't know Tonton was a pig!

When you cannot determine whether someone is friend or foe and you can't risk engaging with them, what then? Shukaku devises a strategy which involves boxing everyone off into their own circle, whereby everyone has the rule that you cannot leave the perimeter, just wait for enemies to come to you. It quelled the heavy troop losses, but it's just a stalemate when it comes to understanding.

Fortunately Naruto has come out of the island and sent shadow clones to every battlefield; he can sense hatred in KCM mode<sup>[21]</sup>, thus he's able to uproot the Zetsu. I say uproot because Kishimoto clearly based him on the mix of a Venus fly trap - in that he has the same "shell" around his body - and the Mandrake plant, though there are a multitude of similarities for the latter.

Ironically the mandrake since ancient times was designated for use as a form of pain relief, aphrodisiac and so forth, but now we see the properties inverted and Zetsu stands as the plant which will inflict pain on the entire world, growing to a 100,000 strong in order to restore mother. "Mandrake is a cure for all except death"<sup>[22]</sup> is a nice quote for it shows the helplessness of Zetsu in that he can get everything else he wants but to see Kaguya again will be a task which requires almost a millennia of patience.

If a woman had a desire to conceive she would hope to find a mandrake in the shape of a baby and put it under her pillow, and men would find a mandrake root which was in the shape of a woman in hopes of finding a partner. Moreover, Zetsu's shapeshifting being tied with people's desires helps explain his link to the Divine Tree, as all of them are the result of the last lifecycle, i.e., all the people that had been trapped in their own dreams. This is confirmed when we turn to Richard's Folkard's book *Plant lore, legends and lyrics*: "The Mandrake-root and the Fern-seed have the magical property of granting the desires of their possessors"<sup>[23]</sup>.

In a paper written by Anthony Carter<sup>[24]</sup>, it's noted that Mandrake plants contain Hyoscine, which has the ability to cause hallucinations and in high doses, coma. This shows that it can cause the same sort of effects that were noted for the Tree itself, but this is only a side-effect of its ingestion, with the real purpose being to suck out the chakra of those it entangles.

“Mandrake roots became highly sought after in their native Mediterranean habitat, and attempts to protect them from theft are thought to have been the source of the second mandrake myth, which stated that a demon inhabited the root and would kill anyone who attempted to uproot it”<sup>[24]</sup>. That a demon lives in the mandrake coincides with the ability for demons to have incredible scientific prowess, as they have a sharp understanding of the physical body but not an inkling of the soul. They have no ability whatsoever to detect or rejuvenate it, which may be why neither Zetsu nor Obito could understand what caused Nagato’s betrayal, and they probably didn’t know an ability like Naruto’s exists which can detect hatred and help people beyond all apparent attributes<sub>1</sub>.

In regards to their apparent white-black halves, “the Mandrake was sometimes conformed like a man, at others like a woman: the male was white, the female black”<sup>[26]</sup>. Interesting, as the black Zetsu funnily enough has the deeper voice but he does have a negative mother-complex, and is being dominated by that image of the feminine. “Because the root has an uncanny resemblance to human limbs, the mandrake was considered half demon, with great magical properties”<sup>[27]</sup>, and if you’ve done Mythology 101, you know that standard practice is to equate women with chaos, the underworld and so on in a completely non-reductive manner.

The mandrake seems to be representative of a kind of split-personality as it is called the “Singing plant” when it is looked after: “In France (19th c.), the mandrake was thought to have the ability to sing, and its song had the magical potential to endow the alchemist with powers of transformation just like the philosopher’s stone”<sup>[28]</sup>; likewise, it was said to shriek when it was uprooted and turned into the shrieking plant - this last tidbit was seen in Harry Potter with Professor Sprout. This dynamic may correspond to

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<sup>1</sup> It is also why in *Faust*, Mephistopheles is asked by multiple women to heal their physical injuries, yet he is no doctor of the soul<sup>[25]</sup>

their nicknames, where White Zetsu is called “wagging tongue” whilst Black Zetsu is called “Wicked Tongue”<sup>[29]</sup>. I believe Kishimoto has used this trauma of the Mandrake being uprooted as a clear psychological analogue for being separated from Mother Earth, and we see the antithetical position in Naruto who yearns to separate from her grip and be free.

This brings me to my next topic of exploration, which is about the history of the Mandrake and its relationship with the alchemical idea of the Homunculus. The most recognised efforts of alchemists was in regards to the transmutation of base metals into gold, but another was to create living beings - tiny people called Homunculi, championed in particular by people like Paracelsus<sup>[30]</sup>. This was due to the Alchemist believing they could decode the secrets of nature, thus harnessing the transmutative power of the elements and fashioning their own person out of material in a similar way to how God fashioned the first people from clay.

In regards to mandrakes, there was investigation into whether you could go from the harmless effigies and figurines of people into an actual living being. Disturbingly, the fluids from those who were hanged was said to birth the mandrake, with depictions of it showing the plant beneath a gallows-man with their hands tied behind their back and so on<sup>[31]</sup>. This isn't too dissimilar from how white Zetsu are made from the Divine tree<sup>[32]</sup>, but seeing as it has to be somewhat child friendly the anime doesn't go that far and instead shows them pleasantly wrapped up in a kind of pod for the transformation to occur, so as not to make out that they are being hanged, consecrating the merging of mandrake and human form.

There is a second type of homuncular production which doesn't involve the delicate merging of spirit and matter, but the purification of spirit *away* from the material world. I evidenced something along these lines in the Pain section, where Christ's descent into Hell mirrored the *ignis gehennalis*



and the heat turns one into a bald babe<sup>[33]</sup>; this is what develops the *spiritual* purification of the stone. What's more, in the *Visions of Zosimos* it details what are by most accounts the first articulations of this kind of homunculus. He is walking through a temple and sees a bowl-shaped altar, and upon closer inspection sees boiling water, with a multitude of little people inside<sup>[34]</sup>. They were in agonising pain, which is the separation of spirit from the body; Zosimos notes that the eyes of the homunculus began to fill with blood<sup>[35]</sup>, which is the same effect that we have seen subsume Naruto in the past when being boiled by the demon fox's chakra<sup>[36]</sup> during what can now be seen as a "failed separation". We also see those eyes during his introspection at the waterfall prior to becoming this consolidated self-consciousness, with the black demonic half and a lighter jovial half to mirror the split-personality of Zetsu.

Naruto has had to undergo this confrontation with Kurama because the stone(lapis) is born from the fire<sup>[37]</sup>, and now he is the golden one who burns without corruption. As Jung notes in his *Alchemical Studies*, the King is none other than Gold, the king of metals<sup>[38]</sup>, which comes about through a liberation of the divine soul from the flesh<sup>[38]</sup>; he expands on this quote to say that 'flesh' should really have been replaced by 'ore' or 'Earth' as the world had to be separated from in a *moral* sense, as this was the journey to attain the '*philosophic gold*' - a life-spirit which represents that aspect of the lapis<sup>[39]</sup>. We also see this in Naruto, as when he is in KCM mode he gives life-energy to Yamato's mokuton<sup>[40]</sup>.

This type of development is totally alien to Zetsu, but this comes from the type of Homunculus he is, being rooted in the physical world. In the paper *The Homunculus and the Paracelsian Liber de imaginibus*, Amadeo Murase shows the worldview of such a being as they think the external shape and form of an object must correspond to internal states and abilities<sup>[41]</sup>. Because a homunculus *looks* like a human, they must therefore share the

same being and do anything that they can<sup>[41]</sup>. Using this theory it is no wonder why Zetsu's plan is genius, for surely there exists no means of identifying him, and it shows the sad state of affairs amongst people when Shikaku can devise no other strategy. But there is also mention of an inner spiritual nature<sup>[41]</sup>, and this seems to be what Naruto alone has attained.

## Guess who's back, back again...

Now the medical corps can treat the right people without fear of their medics dying and many of the reanimated shinobi are being sealed, though there is one that's going to be a challenge.

Nagato senses him incoming and feels a warm nostalgia. Itachi is both surprised and impressed to see Naruto's rapid development and his control over the Nine-Tails. Nagato smirks since they are of the same mentor, he isn't surprised. He sacrificed his life for his faith in Naruto to find the means to overcome pain and stop the ceaseless cycles of Samsara, but now he sees there is another Ninja war! Not only that, but he has been dragged from the dead to participate, just as he revived his own Pains when he attacked Konoha - "Never would I have thought I'd have to battle you again Naruto!"<sup>[42]</sup>

He asks him, has he really been able to overcome hatred and resist falling back into the lap of Nine-Tails? Such a deep and consequential question to which Naruto smiles and says "Yeah!" - of course! But he doesn't forget to mention all the people that have helped him do it, including Nagato himself "who taught me what pain really was"<sup>[43]</sup>.

The reunion is less joyous for Itachi however, as he has to hear about the fall of his brother and the secrets of his mission have also been revealed; but he relaxes a little as this intel leak is only between Naruto, Yamato and

Kakashi who can't confirm anything Obito said. Seeing that he's completely failed, he reasons that it's best if he leaves Sasuke to Naruto.

Before dialogue can continue, the reanimation tightens its grip on them and they do battle, with Itachi activating his Mangekyo, causing the eye implanted in the crow to emerge<sup>[44]</sup>. Itachi's first insurance policy of having the amaterasu in Sasuke's eye take out Obito didn't work, but here the Kotoamatsukami was used in a way he probably never thought possible, as he's put himself under genjutsu to act only in a way beneficial to the village.

Itachi's Will was first bound by the Edotensei and now he has a second layer of constriction, and yet he feels freer somehow. He knows that through the aid of his friend he will act in the way he had wanted to all along, the least he can do now is stop the Reanimation jutsu. But Naruto exclaims that's his job - on top of stopping the war, fighting hatred, saving the Hidden Rain, the Hyuga, Sasuke all on his own<sup>[45]</sup>. That's getting involved in a lot of people's issues and I doubt he will have the time to genuinely resolve all of them in the spirit of Ashura's proactive restoration; if he feels obligated to solve all of this himself, he may need an all-encompassing solution like the Infinite Tsukuyomi, which Itachi illustrates: "You said it was everyone who cares about you who helped you get where you are now. But if you forget that, if you become so powerful that you don't remember why you are strong ... you'll eventually end up like Madara"<sup>[46]</sup>. Just because Naruto is the sole person who can generate spiritual ties with anyone doesn't mean it's all on him to fix things, as no matter how he tries to chop and change his philosophy, after that step he will be no different from a villain.

# 19

## Madara enters the war

The main battlefield is in the desert after the other companies have had mixed results. There have been great battles won in parts, but Darui's company suffered massive losses as Obito unleashed the Gedo statue, wiping out thousands. He used that opportunity to successfully retrieve the Ninja tools containing Kinkaku and Ginkaku - a last resort to ensure he possesses every Bijū's chakra.

Kabuto goes on to summon Madara to which he wrongly asserts that this was Nagato's Rinne Rebirth, and he's shocked to discover this is a Reanimation jutsu<sup>[1]</sup>. The war is now rising into its critical juncture, as both "Madaras" have appeared with the same vision of negating this world into a dreamscape. He's worried as he thinks things can't have gone to plan if he's being revived like this<sup>[2]</sup>, which is somewhat true. Kabuto talks to him through Mu and makes him aware that it was *he* who summoned him. Now that he's up to speed, the next steps will be to take out some buzzing flies before he can unfurl his master plan.

Kabuto has made some improvements, properly integrating the cells that Madara had bitten off, and instead of reanimating him at the age he was at death, he clears up the ageing DNA back to the time of his prime<sup>[3]</sup>. He smugly claims Madara has achieved the power thanks to his modifications, but he had awakened the abilities of the Rinnegan long ago, this is not a product of his creation!

The last time we saw destruction on such a large scale was when Nagato pushed the entire Leaf Village out the entrance gates and left a barren crater

at the epicentre, setting the benchmark for what a “God” is capable of; however, his planetary devastation couldn’t even halt the Nine-Tails. Nobody was so utterly awe-stricken by Pain that they gave up fighting, but with the imminent descent of a planetary body people are dropping their weapons and accepting defeat, even Gaara who is the Commander is on the edge of giving up. Onoki hasn’t thrown in the towel though and races up to counter the meteorite, making it as light as possible and with Gaara’s sand it seems to have stopped.

“Now... What are you going to do about the second one, Onoki?”<sup>[4]</sup>. Madara wants them to understand pain, but also futility. There is absolutely no conceivable angle with which they can win, you are living in an absurd dream for thinking there is hope, so allow him to give you a better one. To hurl the moon, which is a symbol for dreams, is an apt metaphor for what he wants to do in general - *throw* people into their fantasy, and if one is insufficient then a second moon shall articulate his point.

He has a go at summoning the Nine-Tails, but sees the beast is still outside his control. This greatly unnerves Kurama as his least favourite master is only a few feet away, and he offers to lend Naruto power for the last thing he wants is to be under his possession again. Now Naruto is not so bad<sup>[5]</sup>. Madara would never even think of trying to understand him beyond his image as a beast either: “You are an ignorant and unstable power, and those who shall guide you... are the Uchiha. You Bijū are simply servants of those with ocular powers. Now obey”<sup>[6]</sup>. Kurama believes people will probably try to own him forever, but he still has minor preferences in ownership.

This potent belief in a lack of change toward peace and harmony is concurred by Madara and Kabuto, who don’t see the world learning from its mistakes any time soon; Onoki admits it has led to that which “does nothing but battle. We fight for our nations, our villages. We just take from

other nations, other villages! We take back from them, they take back from us again! Three times our hatred has caused all-out war”<sup>[7]</sup>. Madara says this is just a fact of life and is he surprised at his ripe old age that this is the case? This is the Fourth Great Ninja War after all, has anything really changed? Onoki believes it has: look at all the Shinobi from the five nations now battling to achieve something which is of common good to all, “though slow in pace, the world does accrue its past experiences and grow toward peace”<sup>[8]</sup>. This is another resolution of this manga in miniature, that the dream is on its way even though everyone at one time or another had lost sight of it.

This is no longer a war solely to protect Naruto - but a war to protect each other<sup>[9]</sup>. Fusing Village Identities yields the creation of something timeless, symbolic, as all the disparate aspects of strength and defence are collated. When the Five Kage defend, it is with the rugged stone golem and the soft, malleable sand that encompass larger facets of defence<sup>[9]</sup>. When they attack, Onoki makes the Raikage much lighter so his speed increases by a couple orders of magnitude<sup>[10]</sup>; this is the beginning of a kind of love between villages, expanding on the vital importance it plays for villagers.

Originally, the only reason Onoki joined the allied forces was so he could get rid of the Akatsuki, but in this war he has realised there truly is the possibility to change the Shinobi system and reform the cycles of hatred<sup>[11]</sup>. He tells Naruto that he must confront the other Madara and they’ll handle things here - they promise to win!

## You aren’t Madara, silly!

The moment he releases the clone he clashes with Obito, adding another tally to the number of demons he’s headbutted<sup>[12]</sup>.

He sees that Obito has a Rinnegan too, like the other Madara. The jig is up! Tell us who you really are for goodness sake. “Heh heh, you can call me by my past name Tobi, then. Now that the war has begun, names are irrelevant. Madara... Tobi ... use whatever you like”<sup>[13]</sup>. It’s funny that Obito has taken on the name “Madara” to represent his philosophy, just as Naruto’s name is from the teachings of Jiraiya in the book *Tales of a gutsy ninja*, and both have accepted their name as part and parcel of how they see the world; Naruto’s is a precious heirloom that has been passed down from his sensei and anointed by his father which typifies their hopes in him for continuing their quest to find true peace in this world; on the bleaker side of things, Obito has had the quest passed down to him from his master to become the saviour after a series of losses, with nothing but pain, suffering and futility to show for it. Madara says “the only thing passed down is hate”<sup>[14]</sup> which shows that this is Indra’s way of perceiving history.

Naruto trusts in the “spiritual cabling” that has been laid out aeons before and will continue to do so aeons after, but for Obito this chord should be cut, as what have the innumerable generations been able to resolve? Nothing. Unless things *are* solved, to him it’s the same as no work being done at all. All this effort for the sake of abundance and prosperity, but now this can be envisaged within the dream.

This seems to be the nature of the “vain mind” that can reject such things, articulated by our old friend Hegel again, who notes a certain kind of vanity that knows better than any as to what each is, regardless of what their specific nature is<sup>[15]</sup>, in this case the primary nature being emptiness. Indeed, this grows into a kind of governance which is so clever it knows of all others without ever consulting them and aspires to be the figurehead. Power and wealth are the highest echelons of attainment, done with sacrifice and renunciation(of the self), becoming universally recognised and accepted<sup>[15]</sup>. Such a phenomenon seems to be confirmed by what Tsunade

said after the actual Madara is revived: “it is as if a presence like Madara’s does exist in this realm. So even if one is full of deceit, if you can convince the world, it will quake in fear. The name itself is power. It draws your attention and the lie then drew us all into war! We’ve been trapped hook, line and sinker...”<sup>[16]</sup>

Obito has gone on to exhibit the nuanced, most recent adaptation in vanity which is to dissolve oneself, even though it was traditionally the state of trying to inflate one’s grandeur and appearance. Now it is in the art of demolishing and reducing the self and taking pleasure in it, as with this the ego can rebuff the accusations that come with being “self-centred”, “self-interested” and thus the self as such must go, but this is just proof of a grander negative egoism.

It stems from the fact that in every “nobody” the ego has had a “negative awakening”, which was articulated in the research of psychologist Erich Neumann(1905-1960); when the solute(the ego) is weak then interaction with the solvent(the Uroboric Mother) will be strong. The latter is the one who finds the act of dissolution pleasurable, and will incite the same pleasure in the subject to which shall find their unconscious identity preferable<sup>[17]</sup>. During the ego’s initial development there is the danger of such a phenomena happening, especially if the catalyst of said awareness was a traumatic experience. It’s birth will be all the worse when there is no prior self-reflection or negation upon themselves, and thus the world keeps them in its grasp, as was the harrowing case for Obito.

## A totemic change.

It is no coincidence that Obito’s plan of world domination should run into Naruto at this level of development at this particular time, as Minato was the one who made the decision to put Kurama inside of his son because of



the future threat he posed<sup>[18]</sup>. He was the one that threatened the Five Nations and spurred their Allied Shinobi Forces, pushed Kurama to reconcile with Naruto and ended up making him the symbol of global unity.

But a lot of this newfound collaboration has been reactionary, as is initially the case with the Fox. Naruto was given power to stop *Madara's* assaults, not to hasten their friendship. During the smackdown with the six Jinchuriki, Five-Tails made a charge for Obito but he was pinned down and scaled back to his second-state, but a small voice ebbed out of the trance: "so painful... can't believe I'm his..."<sup>[19]</sup>. It's sad that a fellow Bijū has been treated that way and yet Kurama isn't surprised and scolds Gyūki for being angry now. It's always been the case<sup>[20]</sup>. He refuses to wag his tails this time, even when Naruto is in the belly of the Monkey King, because "No matter what words they use... humans are always saying the same thing"<sup>[21]</sup>; although, he has found someone which has promised to go after the hatred in *him* someday, which admittedly has never happened before.

As Naruto steadies himself, he finds Son and initially calls him Four-Tails, but he won't take that objectification lightly! He demands to be called his full name, spiel and all, the "Sage equal to heaven" which was the self-proclaimed title of the Monkey King Sun Wukong as well<sup>[22]</sup>. For someone like this to regard him as just Four-Tails is an insult and implies his subordination; what's more, his home of Suirendo (Water-Curtain Cave) is of similar nature to the one Naruto had managed to push through, and seeing that they have done the same tests of character, they should be equals. This must be why the Monkey King out of all the Bijū swallowed him up, to illustrate the equivalence between them and humans. Despite the awkward introduction, Naruto genuinely wants to help Son and remove the chains that bind him, to which he cannot believe a human could empathise with him.

After a bit of rummaging through the maze of hair, he finds the chakra rod at the base of the neck and successfully pulls it out, but this merely binds chakra to the former Jinchuriki's body... the tailed beast chakra itself is still within the Gedo Statue which gets transmitted to each body in turn. To break them out of the statue is an entirely different matter. Son thought it was only worth telling him how to stop him from attacking, but his intention was to render him truly free; Naruto came back to him panting and covered in sweat<sup>[23]</sup>, with his seriousness convincing Son that it's worth passing on some of his power as a parting gift.

Kurama is also willing to give him some more strength in fighting the other Madara. They have a light hearted argument before sharing the same fist bump as he did with the Monkey King<sup>[24]</sup>. The two of them have really come a long way, and now Naruto thinks of those words Iruka spoke when he was only a little furball: he isn't just the Fox but Naruto Uzumaki of the Leaf, and through his name he shall be inaugurated as a citizen of Konoha<sup>[25]</sup>; indeed, I don't even think it's possible to integrate someone into your life based on attributes alone, for otherwise once they've trodden outside that space - they're gone! By naming it encompasses all that they are, and it's a declaration to go on a journey no matter where Kurama takes him; as Naruto said for his friend, "Sasuke is Sasuke"<sup>[26]</sup> no matter how dark or different his chakra may be.

Having a Bijū like this to symbolise a deep spiritual relationship with nature in the form of an animal or plant has been illustrated in a diverse range of cultures and societies, noted by scholars like Levi Strauss and Erich Neumann. In *Origins and History of Consciousness*, it mentions man's original orientation in the world as being situated in Totemism - a philosophy which regards certain animals as an ancestor, a friend/guide and providential being<sup>[27]</sup>. But this relationship is 'masked' as there isn't a full disclosure between the spirit and person, and stays in the realm of symbol

and metaphor. Sometimes the totemic animal is designated another name than that applied to the actual animal itself<sup>[28]</sup>. This dynamic is evidenced by the fact that until now Naruto always called him “Nine-Tails” and had a distant relationship to his totem, but now the one knows the other as such, and as Jung highlights, the name of an individual is his soul<sup>[29]</sup>.

Prior to comprehending how a Bijuu’s needs could be recognised as similar to his own, he hadn’t given any thought to the possibility Tailed Beasts could have their own name<sup>[30]</sup>. He was more than happy to “hunt” for his chakra and battle it out and break the rites of passage between him and his totem; standard practice for tribesman in regards to ritual would’ve been to ask permission before things like the killing of an animal, and apologies to be made afterwards<sup>[31]</sup>. We saw progress in Naruto on Turtle Island, as after he took some of Kurama’s chakra, he says “I promise I won’t do wrong by you, just hang in there for a little while”<sup>[32]</sup>. Now he asks for nothing in return, and wants him and all other Bijuu to be free, because he has understood what type of friendship they want with people.

It is said that the key to developing the bond with one’s Totem is by Participation<sup>[33]</sup>, a shared experience which brings both into Being, and it’s precisely what Kurama prioritised when he watched Naruto try and rescue Son: “Naruto... if you’re absolutely serious... and truly wish to do something for us Bijuu, then just do as you’ve always done. Prove it through your actions”<sup>[34]</sup>.

The last point I want to make regarding the incorporation of Totemism will be the idea that this is another avenue in which the participant cultivates their *individuality*, as the Totem represents the innate ancestral experience, the totality of the group, which becomes enshrined in the heart<sup>[35]</sup>. For Naruto in particular, the hosting of the Nine-Tails has been something his clan had to do since the dawn of Shinobi, from Mito, to

Kushina and now himself. The meta-chains - the expectations of society and the willingness to address Evil itself have loosened, and just as Naruto has intersessioned with him, Kurama is willing to let this image of Naruto as vessel, keeper and exploiter fade away. Now they stand as one holistic chakra.

In connecting himself to Kurama he can now enter deeper into the collective Bijū psyche plane, or the fabric of the collective unconscious<sup>[36]</sup>. Prior to him popping up, Son had relayed his confidence that Six Paths' message had finally come true in this child: "even if you are far apart, you will always be together, and eventually, the day will come when you will be united again [...] and unlike when you were inside me, you shall be led properly. I hope you learn what true strength is before that time"<sup>[37]</sup>. That moment would arise when all the Bijū, which are based on Yokai - the more demonic and nefarious ones - would come to know love and the support of people.

Each of the Tailed-Beasts and their Jinchūriki greet him, and on the level of Names he shall know them - similar to Adam naming all things in the world. But the true array of connections comes from Naruto's emergent symbolism with the Egyptian God Thoth, who was said to be the messenger, intercessor and conciliator between the different Gods<sup>[38]</sup>. This will be one of his new roles, to provide a space for communication that all Jinchūriki and their beasts can use, dialoguing whenever problems occur. What's more, "he was 'lord of divine words', 'lord of Maat', and 'judge of the two combatant gods', Horus and Set"<sup>[39]</sup>. Divine words being the crucial point, and in Ancient Egypt knowing the names of the Gods was a very select privilege to the point where even other Gods may be unaware, and Naruto is bequeathed a sliver of their joint power.

Thoth is held in high esteem because of his adherence to truth and rightness, earning the epithet the heart of Ra<sup>[40]</sup>, which dovetails with our protagonists' conviction that won over the tailed beasts. Lastly, the connotations with Thoth and a baboon are listed as one of his original zoomorphic forms<sup>[41]</sup>, and assisted in the rights of the deceased, helping Anubis by recording the results whilst he checked the scales. Thus completes a diverse and yet self-similar suite of connotations with the Monkey King, of rightness and of assisting Horus and so forth.

Jumping out of the Egyptian metaphors and psyche planes back into the story, Naruto has undergone his first tailed beast transformation which is a bit hazy and mostly chakra rather than flesh, but he and Bee put up a good fight and push Obito into a corner. "Naruto was always merely a pawn to test Sasuke. He was supposed to be an amusement. So what is it? What's happened? It doesn't matter. Doesn't matter who or what Naruto is now!"<sup>[42]</sup>. The primary goal is to enact the Infinite Tsukuyomi and with the slivers of Eight and Nine-Tails chakra he possesses it signals the transmutation into the ten tails - the symbol of Destruction itself, though it could be said to be the symbol of Nature, and thus the symbol of change: "The return of Ten Tails! the beginning of the end of the world!"<sup>[43]</sup>!

## 20

# The Dawn of Ten-Tails

The summation of all ten tailed beasts is said to be the progenitor who shaped these lands, where you hear phrases like “he drank oceans, split open the earth, hoisted up mountains”<sup>[1]</sup> in that typical absurdist fashion. These feats coincide with the abilities of the Yokai that correspond to him: “Ameno-Hitotsu-no kami, Datara, Deidarabotchi, he has many names”<sup>[2]</sup>; the last one in particular is a Yokai who stands as tall as a mountain, with equivalent sculpting ability. Daidarabotchi are so large that their steps can shape the world. They are the ones who build mountains by aggregating rocks and dirt, even picking up mountains to other places<sup>[3]</sup>.

Aside from being a giant, there are also connotations of him being a blacksmith, as Ameno-Hitotsu-no Kami is the God of iron and metallurgy who has one eye. It is said he fashioned the weapons during the time when Amaterasu was in her cave<sup>[4]</sup>. And lastly, Datara is most likely a reference to the Yokai Ippon-Datara, who is also a one-eyed blacksmith. The reasons these two motifs sync up is because it’s said a blacksmith will close one eye to judge the temperature of a heated metal, and in this case loses it due to repeatedly staring at the intense flames. The blacksmiths are also an invaluable asset in Greek Mythology, with Hephaestus being the most gifted metalworker, forging Zeus’ Thunderbolt<sup>[5]</sup><sub>1</sub>.

The Ten-Tails being the God of metallurgy could also be interpreted as a negative becoming if you look through the lens of the apocryphal *Book of Enoch*, as it was the Fallen Angel Azazel who taught humans metallurgy, and

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<sup>1</sup> In the Rigveda the toolmaker Tvashtar is also seen as the one who fashioned Indra’s Thunderbolt(The Vajra)<sup>[6]</sup>.

was punished the heaviest by God: "The whole earth has been corrupted through the works that were taught by Azazel: to him ascribe all sin"<sup>[7]</sup>. Hell was born out of the fallen angels, and the spirit of astounding art, master craftsmanship and so forth was taken into the domain of emphasis on the self and all its passions: "And Azazel taught men to make swords and knives and shields and breastplates; and made known to them the metals [of the earth] and the art of working them; and bracelets and ornaments; and the use of antimony and the beautifying of the eyelids; and all kinds of costly stones and all colouring tinctures. And there arose much godlessness, and they committed fornication, and they were led astray and became corrupt in all their ways"<sup>[8]</sup>. The power to forge tools and shape the world in the same way as the Gods is thus the power necessary to make dreams reality.

## The mask comes off!

It's the four of them versus Madara, and Kakashi wants to try using his Kamui to take the head off the Gedo Statue. To his shock horror it's immediately negated, and he suspects this "Madara" has an ability linked to his, but he's not sure of the details<sup>[9]</sup>. Things become clearer when he throws a Kunai at Obito and it passes through his head, but teleporting that blade into the Kamui dimension lands a hit precisely on the part Obito had phase-shifted, scratching his mask<sup>[10]</sup>. He's pretty sure that his hypothesis is correct, but wants to confirm it with this next attack.

Naruto runs at him with the rasengan and Kakashi sucks into the Kamui realm; as Naruto's body phases through a part of Obito, it makes contact with the rasengan just like last time. He has figured out that this is all one jutsu in different directions<sup>[11]</sup>. Their timespaces are linked, but this isn't usually the case for people using teleportation ninjutsu, so he asks Madara where he got his eye. Sure enough, he says he got it around the time of the battle of Kannabi Bridge in the Third Great Ninja War<sup>[12]</sup>.

Kakashi is shaken that the man across from him is most certainly the friend he couldn't save. But now isn't the time to wallow in regret, he has to formulate a plan. He uses Kamui to teleport a Shadow clone that's ready to strike at the moment Obito has to phase-shift his body to avoid the Bijū Bomb<sup>[13]</sup>, and after all this time the mask is finally off.

## Between this world and the next

This is where we are taken back to Obito's period of isolation, immediately following the incident during the war. He wakes up to see some grey dishevelled face looming over his bedside, saying he is neither living nor dead but trapped between two worlds<sup>[14]</sup>. He tries getting up but it's unbearably painful to move. "The fact that you feel pain means that you are still alive"<sup>[15]</sup> and for this act of kindness he expects Obito to repay his debt.

Upon first landing into Madara's clutches we see that he thinks rather low of his mantras about pain, suffering and futility being all there is<sup>[16]</sup>, and tries to tune out the lecture. The Zetsu are also trying to get him to understand the master plan, but a bit more nonchalantly: "Just think of it as all of us going to this huge dream world that was created using genjutsu! Well, it's more like forcibly taking everyone there... and for life too"<sup>[17]</sup>. Obito thinks it's so stupid he's speechless and goes back to rehabilitation, trying his best to walk, to move and so forth. Such an idea sounds preposterous because he holds a dream already!

Months go by and Obito realises he can't leave this place as there's no exit, and it will take time to smash the boulder that blocks the main entrance. Madara doesn't actually need to break his Will here as Obito's hope is narrowing towards his goal on its own, combined with all the Zetsu that surround him all that's left is to plant the seeds of despair: "I told you, things don't go as planned. You'll eventually catch on too"<sup>[18]</sup>. He won't be able to



leave until Madara is assured that the only contact he makes with “the wider world” shall break him.

There is a similar motif in the movie *Pinocchio* of all places, where the main villain, the Coachman, keeps donkeys trapped in boxes and breaks them psychologically before sending them off to work in the salt mines/circus, where they’re used essentially as slaves. There is a scene where one donkey still has a hat and jumper on, signs of individuality, and tries to resist by calling for his mother. Upon hearing this the Coachman throws him to the side and says he’s not ready yet - he still has a voice. In time it shall temper, soon he will be without character like the other donkeys in boxes. Indeed, the only reason Madara assuaged Obito’s desire to break free was because he set up the entire death of Rin, and suddenly the Zetsu are bending over backwards to help him get out once they’re being attacked.

They allow him to use one of the Zetsu as an exoskeleton that allows him to move<sup>[19]</sup> and he’s praying, hoping that he makes it in time. This will be the moment his Sharingan gets used with Kakashi’s, the tag-team will be better than ever!

He gets through the clearing to see his worst nightmare in front of him. His friend has not only broken his promise, but broken it with his own strength. To him, this is the end. “I will not accept any of this!!!”<sup>[20]</sup>. Obito doesn’t know where in the world he is, where could a place that allows such evil be other than Hell? He had managed to stay relatively sane due to their memories<sup>[21]</sup> and progressed based on that dream of coming back: it started in his mind, then travelled down to his fingertips when he broke out, and shattered when he had to hold Rin’s corpse.

What can he possibly do now? For where is there certainty? Madara's words. "Let's create a world where you exist again"<sup>[22]</sup>. He knew he'd return, and that's when he would take his repayment.

"Starting today you shall be the saviour"<sup>[23]</sup>. Now for technicalities: they will need to develop a genjutsu that will be reflected off of the moon to cast a dream upon the world, but they will need the Tailed Beasts. They'll also need to manipulate Nagato - the boy he implanted his Rinnegan into. Now that his ambitions, his Will and plan are clearly laid out he hands Obito his identity and dies; it's more than just trusting him, for he believes Obito's feelings of suffering and futility will never leave, he can be sure he shall strive diligently to bring his dream into fruition. He severs his connection to this world, but only for a moment.

## Mephistophelian roots

This section will look at Goethe's *Faust* and see the panoply of similarities in Obito to that of the two main characters: Faust and Mephistopheles. The latter, which is the equivalent to the Devil, represents the spirit of negation and he is called so by the Lord<sup>[24]</sup> during their short exchange in the opening prologue, right before descending to make a wager with Faust.

The play focuses on a man with vast amounts of knowledge and decades of hard study, yet can't find anything which interests him for more than a moment, so he resorts to magic to converse with the spirits. This is where Mephistopheles greets him, to which Faust asks "who are you" and he responds sarcastically by saying names are fickle and he is someone who should be going after the depths of essence<sup>[25]</sup>. But Faust retorts that names are still indicative of the person, so asks again - who is he? Mephistopheles declares himself the eternal spirit of negation, "And justly so: for all things, from the Void Called forth, deserve to be destroyed"<sup>[26]</sup>. Now we are

starting to see some parallels to Obito, for he thinks everything in this reality is quintessentially flawed, but destruction isn't the answer - instead, a mercy shall be placed upon humanity! What's more, Obito only uses this name as proof that people *don't* want to plumb the depths of essence, and his theory that the entire world only knows each other at a risible level of scattered attributes seems to be true; take his former best friend: of all the times they have encountered each other, as long as he wears a mask and claims to be Madara Uchiha, Kakashi believes it. The fact that the entire world could be brought to declare war on "Madara Uchiha" is proof that nobody knows anything about anyone.

This is one of the major shared motifs, in that the demon will never see adequate justice and thus it only exacerbates the view that things are just tricks, lies and obsequious gamesmanship. Mephistopheles had given Faust the bargain, he had agreed of his own free will and lost; however, the angels came in and swooped the soul before it could be taken<sup>[27]</sup>!

The wager is centred on the idea that Faust will never say the words "Oh moment, thou art so fair" with the feeling of restlessness finally leaving him, but Mephisto thinks he is capable of providing such a thing; in return he shall take his soul. Obito represents the battle between both characters, and this wager is an inner psychological battle to find a moment where life shall be worthwhile, but will that be found within a dream?

After it is agreed, Mephisto and Faust start working together and their travels take them to a wine-cellar in Leipzig. There are three men downstairs who are drinking and having a great time, and Mephisto asks them what - out of all the drinks in all the land - they would desire most<sup>[28]</sup>; for each man they are handed their dream beverage, downing glass after glass, but he warns them that they shouldn't spill a drop. But in their gluttony, wine is spilled and it roars into flame and terrifies the drunkards.

Faust wanted to leave whilst they drank, but Mephisto was insistent<sup>[29]</sup>. Obito shall also sculpt the perfectly tailored dream world, where animals can get whatever they please and there's never a moment of despair without redemption, challenge without success, but stepping outside the boundary will lead to your demise.

Faust ends up meeting a girl called Margarete, nicknamed Gretchen, with whom he begins to fall in love. He begins to lose that sense of feeling eternally unsettled... with her he feels different<sup>[30]</sup>. You should be able to see the clear inversion with Rin, for after he *lost* her his sole moment of happiness and joy was gone and he was sure that the world had become the one which Mephistopheles believed.

To win her heart, the two of them begin plotting their next move and Mephisto works to gather the most beautiful jewels, so he can place them in her room and be astounded by their beauty<sup>[31]</sup>. Goethe does a brilliant job at showing how she becomes recluse and cannot flaunt them at Church, being a devout Christian and all; now we start to see that a life exists separate to the Church's principles and she goes to her neighbour Martha and tries them on: "Walk up and down an hour, before the mirror yonder, We'll have our private joy thereon"<sup>[32]</sup>.

Soon enough she crosses paths with Faust, and all the poetry, plays and theatres are no match for the joys of walking together and being intimate; they share long conversations and whilst she loves his company, whenever she sees Mephisto her blood runs cold<sup>[33]</sup>. She goes on to say that he seems incapable of loving anyone, with his face half of mockery and half of anger.

She is a sweet, innocent girl who doesn't want to make love, especially since she lives in the same home as her parents; but Faust manages to seduce her, with the worry of her mother waking up assuaged by a "sleeping potion" -

three drops of which is enough to stop her from noticing. Faust assures her it isn't harmful but Mephisto on the other hand is fully aware his recommendation is a lethal dose. Later, when Faust and Mephistopheles are making their way to Gretchen's house, they run into her brother Valentine and they get into a brief fight where Faust relies on Mephisto's powers to strike him dead<sup>[34]</sup>.

Things worsen, as Gretchen drowns the child of hers and is sent to prison. He and Mephisto try to break her out, but she has realised the scope of her immorality and all that has happened by letting these two into her life and wants to be judged by God.

In the second Act, Mephisto tries to ingratiate himself with the Emperor initially in the form of a court jester; but upon learning about their financial troubles, he gives some advice on mining to exploit the country's natural resources. He also suggests they use paper money to give the people the illusion of wealth when in reality they're no better off<sup>[35]</sup>. After a celebratory carnival at the supposed stabilisation of the economy, the two of them meet once more with the Emperor alongside his chancellor and courtiers who are delighted with the results; however, upon hearing that he signed all this yesterday, the Emperor can't believe it and demands to know who forged his signature<sup>[36]</sup>. The intendent reminds him that he did, and now he must accept it.

The start of their ascension into politics is reminiscent of Obito's manipulation of Yagura in that he didn't even notice he had been controlled, and that was the starting point for grander plans. The Akatsuki was started in the Rain by Nagato, Yahiko and Konan but when they started to scale up it seems the Mist served as another centre of operations, hence the accusations at the Gokage Summit<sup>[37]</sup>.

Now they have been given a second task by the Emperor and that is to revive the Classical Greek Spirits of Helen and Paris of Troy, but this isn't as simple as a click of the fingers for Mephistopheles. In fact he cannot help Faust at all. One reason that people give for his inability to help is that he is a symbol of the Christian Devil and so cannot interact with Pagan spirits; nevertheless, he is eager to help and tells Faust the way he shall do this is if he interacts with "The Mothers", which Goethe uses to designate the preeminent feminine spirit of creation and generation, of which he will have to plumb the lowest depths of essence to find<sup>[38]</sup>. This is a callback to when they first met, when Mephisto backhandedly told Faust he didn't care about names but the essences of things; this is his calling, and it aligns with Zetsu doing everything for Kaguya, and Obito wanting to be the saviour after seeing Rin die.

Faust tries for the first time to summon Helen, but it is only partially successful, but he can still see her beauty clearly and he is spellbound; most of the courtiers are unimpressed for they don't see the symbolic union at play here of classical and modern, of myths and science and so on. He is trying to get his hands on her, but the phantom shall not be begotten so easily! She strikes him down with thunder and he falls unconscious.

Once Faust's back up, the plan is to go to the classical Walpurgis Night in Greece and meet Helen. As always, Mephisto does some meddling and goes up to her first, informing her that the Greek King Meneleus who she is at war with is coming to kill her, and he recommends they take the service of another Chieftain (Faust) who shall protect them. They finally speak, and whilst she has never heard someone speaking in rhymes like Faust, she finds it oddly charming. He beckons her to come with him and flee to the Eden of Acadia: a domain where people are forever young and they live in perfect bliss<sup>[39]</sup>.

Helen and Faust have a child, Euphorion, but he has inherited his relentless striving, and the beatific, romantic ideals of Helen. All he wants to do is climb high into the sky, into the domain of clouds and stars<sup>[40]</sup>. Both Faust and Helen despair at their child climbing so far up, and he does take it too far - falling off and dying. This is another major motif which is shared between this story and ours: the unnecessary death of someone dear. It was the case for Obito, and he made sure it would be the case for Naruto; the suddenness and shock of Neji's death mirrors Rin's, and this is the first time he has watched somebody pass away in his arms as Gaara and Kakashi had died before he got to them. Additionally, Obito hopes that for all the similarities they have<sup>[41]</sup>, this will be the time that he drops his promise of never letting his comrades die<sup>[42]</sup>.

But before Naruto can mirror his descent, Hinata slaps him out of it and reminds him of Neji's last words. "Brother Neji just said that you hold more than one life in your hands... Do you know what he meant? I will never let my comrades die. Neither those words nor the conviction behind them are lies! For he was able to successfully store them in his heart [...]. It's not just you, Naruto. We *all* hold those feelings within our hearts"<sup>[43]</sup>. He remembers that reciprocity which comes naturally from having a shared bond, and whilst it wasn't Neji's desire to die in war he will make that sacrifice for him if need be.

There is another story which illustrates a similar feeling well, which is the story of Bunpuku - the monk who kept Shukaku inside of him decades ago. Speaking with the tailed beast in the confines of prison, he meditated and would open his palms to reveal the two Kanji for love: heart and acceptance<sup>[44]</sup>. Ironically, that was a tale of caring for tailed beasts as much as a man, whereas the Hyuga were known for caring for man in the same way as beasts. In Shukaku's first exchange with Gaara, where the young boy is surprised by his hatred for humans, he asked "But... you exist to protect

my village, don't you?"<sup>[45]</sup> - "I've never protected you because I wanted to!" which smacks of the same imprisonment and forced servitude of Hisashi, but we see the same solution in the end: love - allowing another to be as equals.

Back to Faust. After the death of Euphorion, Helen fades away, unable to stomach the pain and joins up with her son. But despite losing his family, Faust continues striving ever still and this time he has declared war against nature itself. Following the unnecessary death of his child, this shall be his final act.

His dream is cut short due to the outbreak of another war, as the Emperor has realised the paper money has become worthless and is having to fight to protect his throne. If they help him they could possibly be given land for their efforts, which would be the start of his Kingdom. Faust is sceptical that he can change the tide of the war, but Mephisto shall summon a legion of the foulest demons to assist him.

Sure enough, the war is successful and Faust is bequeathed some coastal land by the Emperor; but there's one cottage that's owned by an old couple that is yet to be his<sup>[46]</sup>. Philemon and Baucis don't trust the Emperor and think foul play has earned him the victory, refusing all offers on their house or relocation to a larger home. They love their quaint and simple routine of going to the local chapel and are happy with it. The bells that ring where they pray annoy Faust no end, as they speak to the inability to partake in the natural life, the simplicity which grinds against his own utopia. It's a nice metaphor that translates to how Obito is irked by the simple principle of bonds that Naruto has and feels he cannot participate since he's committed himself to this path; it's why he selfishly wants to run them into the ground with Ten-Tails' attacks, so they may despair and plead with him to open the world of dreams.



He sends Mephisto and his goons to evict the two of them and relocate them into a palace away from his Kingdom, but they end up killing them instead. Faust had managed to rationalise their eviction in that he was giving them a grander, better palace in return for a complete landmass, but now they're dead he feels genuinely distraught. Finally, he has taken full responsibility for his actions as he realises Mephisto cannot be trusted.

Faust starts to regret the path he has taken, and wishes he could be rid of all the magic, incantations and demons, and face Nature simply as a man<sup>[47]</sup>. In this private moment a person called Care walks in, frightening Faust for she accuses him of being totally without recourse due to his material devotion<sup>[48]</sup>. She breathes on him and he goes blind in both eyes, but he continues on. If anything she has only strengthened his resolve. Care was hoping to blind Faust into inaction by exacerbating guilt, which is one way care can blind people, but for Obito it had blinded him in another. Now he could strive on behalf of people for the goal of the Infinite Tsukuyomi and alleviate all people of their suffering, regardless if they wanted to pursue life in this world. They had only internalised the endurance of the Shinobi to their detriment! All cases were merely people accruing wounds of loss to no avail; but Naruto says "it's those wounds that *prove* your comrades live on inside here. Comrades that you create in a dream so that you can't get hurt aren't real, and that means you're erasing your actual comrades right? Curse or not, I want to keep the real Neji right here"<sup>[49]</sup>.

It's Naruto's goal to push on and create a dream world right here, where the hearts of his friends who believed in him can rejoice in it too. It was in having the courage to face that suffering that Faust would wrestle with nature, to build a community where people can get together and find a way to live in harmony, despite the knowledge that it won't be all bliss. To fight for it every day anew, for this vision he finally says of the moment, "tarry a while, you are so fair"<sup>[50]</sup>.

Obito has gone this far for Rin, as he wanted to keep his promise to her that he'd become Hokage and save the world<sup>[51]</sup>, which mirrors the preeminent principle in *Faust* that "the eternal feminine shows us the way"<sup>[52]</sup> and she was the one who took his hand and spurred that call to adventure<sup>[53]</sup>. Incorporated into different flashbacks is the fact she addresses his wounds, and he never thought that much about the scars he got along the way as they were moving as a team.

The Eternal Feminine was Faust's "Why" as it represented that symbol of benevolence, and Obito encapsulates that in her alongside his promise: "Rin... was my sole light and hope. After I lost Rin , the world as I saw it changed"<sup>[54]</sup>. But after years of mistakes, deaths and siding with the Devil, both characters manage to do good in the end. Faust had technically lost his bet to Mephisto, and as his soul left the body it was his to snatch, but Heaven interjected and he ascended beyond his clutches. But this was only because of the petition by someone he had wronged - Gretchen. At the point of death, Obito doesn't die a criminal, despite his track record, and tries to make amends with the limited time he has. Faust admits that one can't be rid of demons easily as their ties can never be severed<sup>[55]</sup> but still, when Obito took some of the Bijuu chakra from Madara, and restored the Nine-Tails into Naruto and saved his life, he was still entangled with Zetsu after all.

# 21

## Brothers between battle

Sasuke has finally gotten away from the hordes of annoying Zetsu telling him to stay inside, but just as he's making his way through the forest he sees somebody who looks an awful lot like Itachi Uchiha<sup>[1]</sup>. It's weird that our protagonists manage to miraculously encounter him in the forest, but there we are. Itachi tries to brush him off as his priority is to stop Kabuto's Edotensei, but his brother has burning questions.

His anger stems from the truth he discovered and the maddening feeling that he had been left in the dark for so long: "Now you want to run away from me?! Are you running from me out of guilt for being a liar? You have no courage to tell me the truth! I know everything about you! That's why I will destroy Konoha!"<sup>[2]</sup>. Itachi finally reveals what we've long known in that he tried to tell Sasuke something "between the lines" of their match, alluding to the fact people live within their own realities; Sasuke's perception of him has certainly changed, going from the symbol of true evil to be slain to the symbol of martyrdom that performs an Abrahamic-level sacrifice if called upon.

It's funny that he finally has the same eyes as Itachi, which couldn't be qualified more literally<sup>[3]</sup>, but both of them have continued to redefine what this motif has meant over time. It started by matching the hatred he possessed and spurring Sasuke to possess the Mangekyo, then in their final battle he broadened that concept to see if Sasuke knew the truth, or thought about seeing things from his perspective; now Itachi has realised something else, that the signposts he changed weren't Sasuke's only guide, and he can trust in Naruto to guide him from now on.

They make it to the cave where Kabuto has secluded himself, and whilst he's surprised they managed to find his hideout, it's no matter. The Edotensei technique has no weaknesses and he's become a full-fledged sage, what could go wrong? Itachi notes that this jutsu's greatest weakness is him<sup>[4]</sup>, which is pretty darn cool.

They surmise that Kabuto has ingested not only Lord Orochimaru's cells, but the abilities of his prior experiments: Karin's regeneration, Suigetsu's liquid-shapeshifting and the ability to master snake senjutsu from studying Jugo's cells<sup>[5]</sup>. He found Ryuchi cave, the home of the White Snake Sage and shed his skin from a snake - into a dragon<sup>[6]</sup>, a creature which in old myths and tales was depicted as a large snake, so if you consider it a bit weird that he would say "dragon" you can understand that he means the symbolic maxim of the snake.

It is said in the fourth data book<sup>[7]</sup> that the White Snake Sage will bite down on their student and inject them with nature energy, and just as Naruto had to make sure he didn't turn into a frog, Kabuto has to avoid turning into a snake; thus the point of this training isn't to *literally* become a snake, but to maximise the symbolic elements such as poison, knowledge, manipulation and so forth.

Itachi has done much the same sort of journeying, becoming the symbol of the Uchiha as he learnt fire-style, awakened the Mangekyo, mastered genjutsu and learnt the inverse techniques to cover his own weaknesses; kunai training to hit sharingan blind spots, learning water-style etc. Even without that effort he's still leagues above other members as Kabuto remarks: "What sets you apart from the rest of your Uchiha brethren is that you have true ocular powers, the ability to peer into and read people's souls ... and use what you learn in battle. That is why you're so good at deceiving

people... you died a genius ... at lying!”<sup>[8]</sup>. You’ll never be able to trust this man as he perpetually deceives all he meets.

To get Sasuke on the same page, Itachi tells him to remember the time they went boar-hunting as children. This activity seems oddly specific, and rummaging through some Japanese mythology reveals a tale with just a creature - ridden by Susanoo no less! He is pictured on the Boar firing arrows and scattering pestilence (disease) to the surrounding land<sup>[9]</sup>.

The reason might be because he’s being conflated with a very similar God called Gozu Tenno(“Ox-headed Heavenly Deity”), who has been seen as another form of Susanoo for almost a millennia<sup>[10]</sup>, being the cause of and protector of disease and epidemics. This wrinkle triggers relations to Set of the Old Kingdom - the God of foreigners, disorder and so on which helps to keep society strong the same way that continuous but manageable interaction with disease keeps the immune system strong. All of these Gods seem to be on the “societal boundary” and the nation relies on them to have a sound mind and spirit so as not to open the flood gates. In the same way as Set, both Susanoo and Gozu Tenno become a menace when they let that side of them takeover.

There is another tale which speaks of a Demon-possessed Boar, and it was the task of Yamato the Hero to go off and slay the beast. Declaring his quest, he was given “the Sacred Sword” which turns out to be the Grass-Cutting blade(Kusanagi blade). “In his tail alone is the monster vulnerable and he runneth more swiftly than the wind”<sup>[11]</sup>, so he would need to use the sword to sever the tail from the spine. During a heated battle, he managed to straddle the boar like Susanoo and grab at the tail, successfully severing it.

Drawing parallels to Sasuke, he missed his shot as a child when out with Itachi<sup>[12]</sup>, but now against Kabuto he manages to hit the tail precisely with Susanoo's crossbow. It shows how he has grown up and conquered the animalistic, destructive aspects of the Storm God's nature. Just as I mentioned in the *Battle between brothers* section, he had his roots in Korea as a derivative of the male shaman, the same goes for the root of Gozu Tenno; originally he was known as Muto Tenjin which has its root in the word *mundang*, meaning "shamaness", particularly one of Korean origin as well<sup>[13]</sup>. Whenever disease or misfortune had swept through Japan, it was believed to be caused by a certain Kami(spirit) and the shaman was someone who could enter a trance-like state and identify the divinities that were causing it<sup>[13]</sup>. Indeed, to have both a male and female shaman must be to ascertain a psychological completion, for interacting with any kind of spirit for the sake of the nation.

Jumping back into the fight, Sasuke's arrows have created an opening for Itachi to strike, but Kabuto counters, piercing Sasuke's blade through him<sup>[14]</sup>. The first snapshot of the Izanami has now been taken and the crows dispel, marking the end of this sequence.

The fight mellows for a moment and we begin to see some of Kabuto's childhood and backstory. Like Itachi, he was used by the village for his abilities as a spy, but because he had no family or sense of where he came from, all those personalities became much easier to wear; so easy in fact that eventually he had no idea who was the real him<sup>[15]</sup>. Itachi admits that Kabuto was an even greater spy than he, but anything he may find endearing about him, in terms of jointly attacking the village, should be taken with a pinch of salt.

Both of them were chewed up and spat out by the higher-ups in the village even though they just wanted to do what was right, and despite leaving a

legacy of disgrace as the rogue Shinobi that killed his clan and joined the Akatsuki, Itachi still considers himself a citizen of the Leaf<sup>[16]</sup>. This is because I think he grasps the fundamental principles of service - which is to know yourself, as it shows you how you can serve by articulating the sacrifices you can make: "To know oneself is not to achieve everything and become perfect. It is to know what one is and isn't capable of"<sup>[17]</sup>. Kabuto smirks and says that sounds like the philosophy of a loser, but you don't acknowledge yourself at your peril, and you will surely fail if you do not recognise the efforts of your comrades<sup>[18]</sup>, with it panning to his recent words to Naruto.

Kabuto begins to reminisce about the time he was rescued by people from the nearby Convent. He started with no parents, no friends... he didn't even know his own name<sup>[19]</sup>, and so Mother called him Kabuto, giving him his first smile too. When he struggled to tell the time, Mother gave him her glasses and he burst into tears saying thank you uncontrollably. Those were his first memories. Unconditional care, with those closest sacrificing the only things they had regardless of personal cost. Before all this he couldn't remember anything because memories have to be attached to something, someone, and he will never forget her smiling face.

A few years pass and he is aiding in the war by healing any injured Leaf Shinobi. Orochimaru eventually comes across him, noting that he's quite adept at medical ninjutsu, maybe he should become a ninja<sup>[20]</sup>. Kabuto says all he wants is to help Mother as she's given him everything, all he's been able to do thus far is get her a new pair of glasses.

Kabuto was truly a sweet child that got caught up in the pressures of a world at war, and he overheard Danzo's "negotiations" with Nonou, the name of the Nun, and he says they'll need her espionage skills to go into the Hidden Stone for a long-term intelligence operation. If she refuses, the

orphanage will stop receiving money, uncaring of the Third Hokage's assurance<sup>[21]</sup>. His goons imply the orphanage could have a string of "misfortunes" if they don't comply, the type that involves property damage, robbery, child-snatching if necessary<sup>[21]</sup>. Danzo says they shouldn't be appalled, for they are fools which don't understand its significance: her mission is critical to the village's continued stability. On top of that, they'll be taking one of the children to use for a separate mission, and Kabuto voluntarily accepts that job<sup>[22]</sup>.

Five years go by and he has spied in each of the other Hidden Villages<sup>[23]</sup>, but during his undercover work in the Stone he gets ambushed - by none other than Nonou. He frantically tries to heal her but she has no idea who he is, even with the glasses she stares at him blankly like a stranger. It's like he's healing just another patient instead of the person who had given him unconditional love, and he actually stops before getting ambushed again<sup>[24]</sup>.

Now the last cord is severed, even love seems to be fickle. He goes to a nearby lake to wash his hands, but doesn't know what anything means anymore... his name, his glasses - all things bestowed upon him by Mother, now they are just part of the same uniform that he wears now, tokens of an identity which lead to nowhere. As he reaches the climax of his despair, Orochimaru emerges from the lake<sup>[25]</sup> and in typical serpentine fashion offers him "forbidden knowledge": the reasons behind why Nonou went after him and didn't recognise him.

In short, it was because Danzo decided to dispose of both of them because they were too good as spies<sup>[26]</sup>. They possessed too much knowledge about other villages and were considered dangerous. He told Nonou the reason Kabuto had joined the Foundation was to keep payments flowing to the orphanage, and she wished to find a way to liberate him from it. Moreover, that's when he gave her the mission to assassinate a certain person,



ironically that person being him. Over time, she had been fed photos that slowly but surely distorted his image enough so that the “Kabuto” she knew was completely different to the one who existed, thereby making the mission possible<sup>[27]</sup>.

Orochimaru was sent to kill whoever survived the confrontation, but decided to take Kabuto under his wing and make him his assistant at his new hideout - one made especially for him<sup>[28]</sup>. Orochimaru tells him that if you lack sufficient intel to define yourself, continue to acquire different kinds of knowledge and experience so that you have an idea of who you really are. This is mostly correct, but beware of the self that lives *for* experiences! Indeed, what is it integrating into if there is no self to begin with? These things take on a life of their own and use the body as a puppet of sorts. Kabuto thought that this idea of unconditional love no longer existed, as “Mother was supposed to be the parent that didn’t forget me!”<sup>[29]</sup>, but now it’s back to the time before he was found, where nothing can really stick. Nonou did make him into a person, if only a young Shinobi who could assume many different faces - the next one will be Orochimaru’s assistant. This is why I believe that Kabuto genuinely wanted to take Sasuke in a sense because he had a clan, a name which had meaning (the name of Hiruzen’s father) and all these things he hopes shall sculpt a genuine identity.

In this respect he is very similar to Orochimaru, as all these experiments have a deeper psychological relevance. Countless hours in gloomy laboratories, research facilities has certainly improved their skills as a ninja, but neither of them have obtained knowledge about who they are; this is why they both become versed in hundreds (if not thousands) of jutsu, but their personhood hasn’t changed in decades. Orochimaru describes that he undergoes rebirth to find himself “a new, more perfect me”<sup>[30]</sup> which is where that previous Itachi quote about perfection comes into play.

“If you’re not satisfied with what you’ve had so far, just find other things and add them to yourself from here on out”<sup>[31]</sup>. Now, I’ve already referenced this book a few times, but I feel that the *Huainanzi* should be a staple reading for anyone even if you don’t plan to take any governmental office. There are lessons pertaining to all aspects of life, and in the very first chapter(*Originating in the Way*), there’s a lesson extremely pertinent to Kabuto. It talks about a ruler whose heart may fall into mourning when the party ends, the wine stops and the music comes to a close. But what is the reason for this melancholy? It is because one is trying to use what is *extrinsic* to bring peace to what is *intrinsic*, and if you don’t realise the intrinsic nature that lies within you, external things will continue to falsely adorn your spirit. It will never go beyond your flesh and aliven your mind and awareness<sup>[32]</sup>. Many times in that book it stresses the importance of meditative, inner cultivation and the recognition of the Way that coincides with this Quintessential Spirit<sup>[33]</sup>.

This seems to represent the same process that Itachi illustrates to Kabuto using the Izanami: to ask himself serious questions about what he wants to do and where he wants to go, instead of having his Path tethered to somebody else’s. After going through the perils of this jutsu he decides to lend a hand in the war against “Madara” and heal the same complex of relying on someone else’s identity: “Both Obito and I thought we’d lost our place in this world and dragged everyone else into this. But I know now who I am ... and what it is I must do!”<sup>[34]</sup>.

## Another forbidden jutsu

The fight surges on, and Kabuto is forced up onto the ceiling again by Sasuke’s Susano’o, Itachi sees his chance and runs at him, only to be pierced again by the same blade, in the same fashion<sup>[35]</sup>. Now Itachi’s left eye has lost its light and the Izanami has begun. The crows disperse and the horn is

sliced off, but seeing these repeated tricks only makes Kabuto's confidence grow - this is just too easy! But little does he know that his fate has been sealed, to accept it is the only way to climb out.

This jutsu is named after the wife of Izanagi and the last pair of the Kamiyo-nanayo(神世七代, "Seven Generations of the Age of the Gods"). Depending on whether you look at the *Kojiki* or the *Nihon Shoki* for your historical information, in the former you will see a group of five deities - The Kotoamatsukami (別天神, "distinguishing heavenly deities") - as the first to come into existence. The rest of the Gods assigned Izanagi and Izanami the task to develop the Earth by cultivating the islands and having children.

Izanagi was given the Amenonuhoko (Heavenly-Jewelled Spear) which churned up the seas and created Onogoroshima, or *Self-Shaped Isle*. Seeing as that was done, the two of them descended and began to consecrate their relationship in marriage. This involved the two of them circling around a pillar with the two Gods going in opposite directions<sup>[36]</sup>; as the two began to circle it was Izanami who purportedly spoke first and complimented him, but this was said to be improper so they had to go round again. Izanagi spoke first and complemented Izanami, and by completing this ritual they were married<sup>[37]</sup>.

They proceeded to birth more islands, the Gods of each respective element and over 800 different Kami. Once again, there is a difference to whether you read one text or the other, because in the *Nihon Shoki* Izanami doesn't die giving birth to Kagutsuchi(The God of Fire) and *she* is the progenitor of Amaterasu, Tsukuyomi and Susanoo<sup>[38]</sup>. This may be why Sasuke goes on to inherit the Kagutsuchi ability since it is just another member of the inner family. However, in the *Kojiki* his birth was excruciating and burned her

genitals, the pain causing Izanami to pass away into the Land of the Dead (Yomi).

Izanagi went in search of her, but she told him to avoid looking at her since she'd eaten the food of the underworld. Intrigued, he refused her wish and lit his comb into a makeshift torch, beholding the transformation of his wife as she decayed whilst covered in insects and dirt; the image terrified him and he ran out of Yomi and sealed the entrance with a rock, keeping her locked inside for eternity. Enraged at her husband, Izanami promised that for each passing day, she would murder a thousand of their inhabitants, to which Izanagi countered and said he would continue to birth 1500 people each day<sup>[39]</sup>.

That Izanami supposedly stepped out of line in the above world ritual, and Izanagi stepped out of line in the underworld is what caused the rift between them and a very short marriage. In all instances, failure caused a possibly infinite cycle of repeated behaviour: Izanagi failed to bring his wife out of Yomi and separated the two worlds, causing them to cycle independently. But despite the lack of connection, there would be another God going to the underworld, which was Susanoo. Different accounts say he was expelled for excessive grieving over the death of his mother<sup>[40]</sup> or for causing destruction in heaven, but either way he travelled through Yomi and no doubt saw Izanami. Itachi is the person who will be that bridge between the underworld and the living, for he returns to Kabuto as a dead man, and can undo the cycles that plague both worlds.

Itachi goes on to explain the dynamics of the jutsu, whereby you use your Sharingan on a given moment, called Exhibit A, then you take that moment and all the feelings which are part of it to try and recreate it, that being Exhibit A' (A prime). When you make the link between A and A' , the Izanami will automatically link any snapshots between them, so if you took

A, B and C snapshots and then A' you would have a loop of A, B, C and back to A'<sup>[41]</sup>. It was originally designed as a counter to people that would abuse the Izanagi, as people would take a snapshot of reality and write it into a dreamscape and thus start over<sup>[42]</sup>. You're pruning reality for the most desirable result which led to massive problems within the Uchiha. The Izanami was meant to humble a Shinobi and to stop the practice of avoiding inconvenient outcomes<sup>[43]</sup>. The way it works is that the Izanagi takes a snapshot of moment O, and so does the Izanami user; when the fight ensues and the Izanagi user wishes to move away from unfavourable position X back to O, they immediately step into the Izanami as they have repeated that moment themselves, allowing the loop to be created.

In learning the dynamics of the Izanami, Sasuke is appalled that Itachi would try and help Kabuto for "he sees his former self in him" - he views Itachi as perfect<sup>[44]</sup>! It's a similar degree of disgust that Izanagi had when seeing the creatures in Yomi, wanting to cut them off and live separately; however, we know Susanoo wasn't so squeamish<sup>[45]</sup>, which is precisely why he functions as a bridge and to a lesser degree as a shaman.

## Egyptian Mythology, The Eye of Ra and Hathor

It seems that the Shinto story of the Sun goddess Amaterasu going into the cave, out of either anger or shame, has a very comparative story to the Ancient Egyptian tale of the Goddess of the Sun(daughter of Ra) in Hathor. It is said she was jealous of the other Gods and went south to roam the deserts of Nubia. With her gone, Egypt became desolate and darkness enveloped light and chaos threatened order<sup>[46]</sup>.

Ra grew worried and summoned Thoth the Baboon to go to Nubia and bring Hathor back. But if she gets enraged she can terrify even the other Gods, so it couldn't be a force of Will or trickery that gets her out, but a

genuine change of heart. We see that Itachi had tried in the past to pull Sasuke this way and the other, but instead of replicating the trickery seen in the Shinto myth, he introduces love into the equation and Sasuke climbs out of his own accord; what's more, it will be up to Naruto to get Sasuke to return to the village, not by force, but by being there for him as his friend.

Thoth meets Hathor in the desert and tells one story after another of her father Ra, and as memories flood back he offers her some divine food that gives health and joy to the consumer; this also got her thinking of Egypt<sup>[47]</sup>. It's significant as Sasuke had often said that seeing or hearing of his brother brought back memories - "when I'm with you, I remember things"<sup>[48]</sup>. As Thoth thought he had finally managed to convince Hathor, he began to walk back to Egypt, but she realised all of this was just an attempt to take her home - her rage now magnifying beyond anything prior, transforming into a huge lioness<sup>[49]</sup> - her love ended up growing into even greater hatred.

Thoth pleaded that he be allowed to tell one more story, to which she permitted. It ended with the conclusion that Ra is her father, who gave her the power to fight evil, his avenger<sup>[50]</sup>. With that, Hathor became proud and was jealous of nobody else anymore. Naruto(Thoth) does the same thing to other people, as how he obstinately reminded Obito Uchiha who he was, with the memories of the Leaf and dreams of being Hokage.

## The changing tide of history

Kabuto was convinced that he had history on his side, but here he finds himself beaten. Where did he go wrong? He looked at the Shinobi world as a system which has festered hatred, and as Onoki said a couple of sections ago, "three times our hatred has caused all out war"<sup>[51]</sup> because of the belief that states were perpetual enemies stuck in combat. Kabuto can see this pattern clearly as he has been on the frontlines healing injured Shinobi after

all. This “progression” of history, if you can call it that, meant that his plan of using reanimated Shinobi is perfect. As Shinobi are creatures that are irrational and prone to revenge, having to fight and kill your immortal brethren, your best friend or family member brings the highest pain. What’s more, seeing Shinobi *of other nations* go with the intent to kill the ones that sacrificed everything for you must surely spell the most egregious suffering within the Allied Forces right? Each reanimated Shinobi was carefully selected and matched with the corresponding companies that were launched as they had the battle plans relayed by Kisame. This was supposed to crush morale, cause infighting and stop the illusion of collaboration that they were fighting under. But in fact, they only seem to have gotten stronger.

In the moments that we see in the war with Sai and his brother, with Sasori and Kankuro, with Mifune and Hanzo, these are all cases where if the reanimated Shinobi was left with its personality intact they could actually break away from the world and rest in peace. The complete opposite of his prediction happened right at the apex where it was supposed to be indefatigably true. Each of these aforementioned fights is where the reanimated Shinobi died with a certain regret and in their battle they were presented with an answer which resolved their lingering pain. Sai’s brother finally saw the last page of his book which showed the two of them meeting in the middle and instead of fighting to the death, they stood together as brothers not enemies. Sasori’s view of art was that things should be left for posterity as he wanted to immortalise his parents, and this is where his own idea of being an immortal puppet came from. Being reincarnated meant he could be “a true doll that will never rot”<sup>[52]</sup> but Kankuro shows him “the puppets you’ve created will live on forever. As long as there are future generations of puppet masters to inherit the soul that lives within them!”<sup>[53]</sup>. Each new generation will immortalise them in their own way,

which is what he really wanted to pass on, as his parents get a new lease of life each time.

To really hammer home the message, let's look at this last example of Mifune versus Hanzo. Decades ago they clashed and Hanzo was the victor in their battle. Mifune may have survived the injury but the blade was coated in Salamander venom which would kill him within 48 hours<sup>[54]</sup>. Mifune has to face his own death and sees that "people themselves are swords! Which means I also was a blunted edge. So it ends like this? So disappointing"<sup>[55]</sup>. Hanzo tells him that death isn't the end, loss of conviction is the end<sup>[56]</sup>.

He actually respects Mifune as he decided to stay and fight, using himself as a shield to protect his fellow Samurai, giving them the chance to run. If he died he would not be considered a dull blade but a hero. Hanzo offered him compensation for his death in that he would sing his praises for his heroic sacrifice, but the only compensation he wanted was that his fellow Samurai be left alone<sup>[57]</sup>. Touched by this total selflessness, Hanzo gives him the antidote to drink - "I told you that one cannot tell if someone has conviction or not just by looking at them. But sometimes one can tell from fighting that person... and you are a rare one indeed [...] I too have my own conviction... to bring peace to this world. I shall use you as a test case. To see if you will die still embracing your convictions or whether you end up surviving, and abandon those convictions over time"<sup>[58]</sup>.

He made a wager on the development of history and wanted to see just what shape it would take: would it regress to the pattern it always does, or is this philosophy of peace going to produce any tangible proof? Hanzo continued to live on and drifted from his convictions, beginning to associate with Danzo. He forgot about Mifune, but in this moment he can



see that he was wrong. History has shown him the exception will become the new rule.

He entrusts Mifune with his conviction and prepares to kill himself, cutting the sack of salamander poison in his side and breathing it in. This was where Kabuto was shocked that he was disobeying the orders in his tag<sup>[59]</sup> and tried putting him into mindless mode to resume the killing machine ..but he didn't move. "If you remain true to your *self*... you show that you're not just a blunted blade"<sup>[60]</sup>. The answer was found way back, right here, but Kabuto overlooked it.

Each of these Shinobi and Samurai had undergone the journey to understanding what represented their own spirit, which was formed in conjunction with what could support their village; Mifune stayed true to himself and sharpened his blade, aligning himself with the spirit of the Sword, Kankuro wants to inspire new generations of puppet masters, and Naruto wants to inspire a new generation of Shinobi.

Kabuto held that the unwinding of nature was always the front-seat driver, to which mankind was being pulled along for the ride. His experiments were meant to pull out the secrets of nature, which would illustrate his superiority over everyone else. He got to a stage where he had surmised the Rinnegan was the natural progression of the Sharingan when mixed with Senju DNA<sup>[61]</sup>, all without reading the Stone Tablet himself. See, the Sage of Sixth Paths power isn't so illusory, it can be coaxed out with the basic scientific method! Indeed, this is the primary belief for people who have what's called a Naturalist interpretation of history. This is where they assert that reality and "nature" are equal, synonymous terms and there is nothing "supernatural" or "out there" that the scientific method cannot investigate, including the human spirit<sup>[62]</sup>.

These last two words were the last thing to be scrutinised by Kabuto, as he couldn't have had a spirit if he lived as a completely different person from moment to moment, consuming other people's legacy and abilities. But as we see, he was accumulating other people's *functions*<sup>[63]</sup>, the same way that a frog's tongue has a function of catching flies or a giraffe's neck for eating fruit etc, he amalgamates them together.

He does a good job of incorporating the Kekkei Genki of many different people together to become a creature which could survive in any world, any environment and become *anything* - but then, what is *his* purpose? Going down the naturalist route, they would say there is no purpose, in fact it is ateleological. Kabuto says he just wants to continue perfecting Lord Orochimaru's work and conduct new experiments, pushing the limits - essentially gorging on instruments for instruments' sake, becoming the Will of the Instrument.

On the other side of the coin we have the Idealist theory of history, which relies on axioms like human freedom and reason to transcend and live apart from the unfurling of nature. Madara and Obito are ironically invoking a kind of Idealist theory of history because it is precisely their utilisation of power, and the reasoning that Madara articulated to him all those years ago, now he shall be able to "sever the karmic cycle of this world"<sup>[64]</sup>. Looking at what we see of Itachi, he believed as a teenager that he could sit away and cogitate through pure reason alone what the best solution for the village would be, but later adopting an "equivocal" nature of knowledge and awareness, a kind of bounded intelligibility. As he got older, we see that the only things he is now reasoning about with fervour is what he is and isn't capable of, and the intelligibility of oneself rendered clearer through introspection *and* experimentation.

Itachi isn't going to treat Sasuke like his guinea pig anymore, and decides to tell him everything that happened from start to finish: the negotiations, the meeting with Shisui, the ultimatum that Danzo gave him etc. Remember that he's still under the Kotoamatsukami to have him act in the best way for the village, and it turns out that to do so was to be completely honest.

As the pressure toward the coup ramped up, he always kept him at a distance and lied to him as he didn't want Sasuke to get caught up in the complexities of the village<sup>[65]</sup>, but now he starts to think he could've changed Father and Mother and the rest of the clan. I know you're thinking "that's absolutely ridiculous a child isn't going to stop the coup d'etat" and you're right, but I want to bring back an example from our very first section. Inari couldn't defend his father, his mother nor the village and almost became totally steeped in despair due to thinking he had to do it all on his own; however, when reignited by Naruto, he came to inspire the villagers and urged them to come together and take down Gato. When Fugaku was explaining the Coup d'etat in one of their meetings, he explained that his actions were for the future of his children and all of the clan's children; but then if Sasuke were to know, his innocence vanishes and he may have even supported such things. To keep him ignorant would guarantee he could be spared.

The best thing he can do for him now is to allow him to make up his own mind and to reaffirm his own sense of self, but more than that - "you don't ever have to forgive me. And no matter what you do from here on out know this... I will love you always"<sup>[66]</sup>. Aside from the theories of history and the powers of reason, I feel that this unconditional love plays a bigger role than any in who we become, as most people just want to be surrounded by those they love and trust. After the war, Kabuto ended up returning to the orphanage and helping the children, for that is where he felt unconditional love and the warmth of being accepted in name.

## 22

### What is a village?

After Itachi returns to the ethereal plane, Sasuke is left with every emotion there is: joy, sadness, anger, confusion ... the lot. "What is a clan? What is a village? What is a Shinobi? What am I?"<sup>[1]</sup>. As he ponders these questions Suigetsu and Jugo crash through the wall and exclaim they have a scroll which could see them take over the world<sup>[2]</sup>. This would be facilitated by the Shinigami, the Death God, by wearing the Reaper's mask; however, Sasuke sees an entirely different reason for interacting with such a creature as this is the chance to talk with "the all-knowing"<sup>[2]</sup> as he puts it.

Sasuke is smart enough to recognise that he'll need help and comes up with the idea to reverse summon Orochimaru: take a bit of Kabuto's body and apply it over Anko's curse mark, reverse the order of the hand signs and voila<sup>[3]</sup>!

"I want to know what started it all... what I'm supposed to be, what I'm supposed to do [...] I want to know everything so I can finally have the answer. I need to see with my own eyes and decide with my own mind what I must do"<sup>[4]</sup>. This is the necessary talk with the elders of the Underworld that Naruto did, but this time in the form of the Four Hokage. A few times he has been tied up and lectured to like with Kakashi and Obito, and Naruto also went in search of the "real Pain" after being given a forced lecture by Nagato as well. But both are now in the habit of seeking out their purpose by themselves, and this may be when Amaterasu finally comes out of her cave.

In no time at all the previous Hokage are successfully summoned, and it's time for the interrogation to commence. First, Sasuke gets the Third Hokage to tell him everything in regards to Itachi's mission: "Not only did I have him kill his brethren ... I also had him bear the false charge of traitor and keep tabs on the Akatsuki all by himself"<sup>[5]</sup>. Now, the "keeping tabs" thing needs to be made clear, as Itachi didn't send routine reports to the Leaf but had to minimise the damage caused by the Akatsuki internally. For example, when he went to collect Naruto in the first series he would run away from Asuma and Kurenai, he leaked the Akatsuki's goal to Kakashi, had him and Kisame run from Jiraiya and didn't allow Obito to attack the Leaf, hence why they went for Naruto once he had gone outside the village. It also explains why Pain attacks the village immediately after Itachi's death.

The investigation turns to Tobirama's history and responsibility for what essentially led to the "second great rift" between Uchiha and Senju. I cannot state how much of a change occurred when Tobirama had sole authority over the Leaf after his brother's passing. When the village was first established everybody was integrating and convening with different clans, as we know not long after the Senju and Uchiha formalised their alliance, the Sarutobi and Shimura clans also joined<sup>[6]</sup>. People were just so thankful that each passing moment wasn't a catastrophe, and it was in that initial moment of ecstasy that differences were cast aside. Over time however, the village matured and the electric energy died down as they began to have routines and normal lives. Granted, the construction of the Anbu, the Police force, the Chuunin exams were incredibly beneficial and set a precedent for all other nations, but this was the point in time where Tobirama prioritised said stability over other targets.

Ultimately he couldn't live up to Hashirama's standard and combined with the jutsu he invented and the governmental decisions he oversaw, it created many problems down the line as mentioned by Orochimaru<sup>[7]</sup>. Passing

legislation which impacts a group of people, with said group unable to contest the decision with no major standing in government is simply imposition without dialogue, forsaking the very concept of united clans; almost as though wishing for conflict. In fact, the two aspects of the war are his two main failures: the Uchiha and the Edotensei.

Of course it's an oversimplification to say Tobirama was the sole reason we have this war but it added many logs to a fire that weren't put out. He set precedents which weren't revoked, in fact they were encouraged by people like Danzo as Orochimaru summarises: "those who crack down on crime tend to be easily disliked. Plus, the more authority such a group has, the more conceited it can get. By building the police station next to the prison under the pretext of facilitating the monitoring of criminals, you conspicuously shoved the Uchiha clan to the margins of the village. That helped foster the Madara adherents"<sup>[8]</sup>. Hashirama yells at him for slighting the Uchiha and he replies that he gave them positions they were qualified for; this dismisses however the larger point of antagonising the Uchiha and having them be associated with the symbols of authority, force and keeping them in that pen. He restricted their ability to be fully integrated into the village which was their fundamental aim arising from the pact between Hashirama and Madara.

He believed that if another threat did arise they could just be dealt with<sup>[8]</sup>, though this isn't the answer that saved Madara and brought about the creation of the village in the first place. Hashirama never lost sight of the fact that Madara was his *friend*, and despite their inter-clan wars he always offered him a chance for unity. In never wavering, he eventually convinced him to try this idea of a village. The tension between opposites created all things, but this time the duality didn't breed conflict. Tobirama simply doesn't understand this founding principle of the Leaf.

Once Tobirama hears of this man Itachi Uchiha and how much responsibility he put on his shoulders, he notes it under their “cursed fate”<sup>[9]</sup> as he saw the rebellious elements bearing Madara’s Will had been smouldering. He knew that once an Uchiha felt love, if it were taken away, they would feel an ever greater compounded hatred, illustrated by the formation of the Mangekyo. But even though Madara had the most ferocious eyes, with the scars of losses greater than any other member (for he was the first to unlock the power of the EMS)<sup>[10]</sup> he should’ve been the most irredeemable! But he managed to set that aside for the village, for Hashirama. But then seeing his hate take hold once more, ignoring the nuances and complexity, Tobirama reconciled this love as a momentary exception.

Despite this track record, the Uchiha are a clan which felt even *deeper* love than the Senju<sup>[11]</sup>, which is probably why he opted for a careful and more pragmatic approach whereas his brother would’ve made it his mission to stick by any Uchiha who fell into darkness. This is no doubt the harder and riskier method but it’s the only way that it won’t spill over down the line. This intense love is what must’ve surged through the clan when they joined up with the Senju and created the Hidden Leaf, but upon seeing things like Tobirama’s decrees and other events, they must’ve felt betrayed. All the sacrifices of their family members not to give up, like those of Izuna must’ve felt in vain.

Nevertheless, no other clan has represented the Will of fire so clearly, for even the surname Uchiha is just another way of pronouncing Uchiwa meaning “paper fan”, bringing flames into greater intensities; however, there is a second derivation of Uchiha, much like many of the names Kishimoto gives his characters, and this one stems from a type of Samurai conduct called *Uchihatashi*. This can be a type of duel between Samurai or family members as something has caused them to become bitter enemies;

pledges would be made in writing or spoken aloud for the declaration that they would kill their target, which could lead to all-out war between families or clans<sup>[12]</sup>. This highlights the problematic nature of killing others to boost one's own strength, which existed before Tobirama.

It's also worth mentioning that the Susanoo has part of its design based on the Tengu, with its wings and long nose, which has affiliations with the spirit of rebellion and anti-authoritarianism<sup>[13]</sup>, which is why I can see the elders having their feathers ruffled that such a symbol would be affiliated with an already fiery clan, but this element is vital for village health. When directed on behalf of the Leaf it becomes a scrutinising force, but when performed on behalf of the individual it can regress to the rejection of all things as authority, this being demarcated by whether there is hate in the eyes or love.

In the end, after learning about the massacre and the current situation of the Uchiha, Tobirama's final verdict is this: "In the end, they were of use to the village of Konoha"<sup>[14]</sup>. How truly awful. Without them there would be nothing, and it is why he should've been paired with someone who cared for them just as much as Hashirama did, either from the Uchiha and/or outside it. Left alone, he pushes them around like jigsaw pieces in the name of utility and I guess there's no utility in grieving or thinking 'what if' either.

With that awkward recounting we move to the central questions: "What is a village, what is a Shinobi?". He wants to understand how his brother could kill his own family for this thing called Konoha. The answer given will influence whether it is right to exact vengeance or not. This last bit causes Tobirama to become enraged at the brat "possessed by Uchiha evil" but as we've come to see in Sasuke, this is the most rational and unpossessed he's been for a long time.



Hashirama agrees to tell him the meaning as it is understood by him, and we rewind back to a time of innocent stone skipping at the river. Madara is trying to reach the other side, and here he comes, beating him from the start - "I'm your stone skipping rival, though I've already reached it"<sup>[15]</sup>. Despite the formalities they had to walk through, Hashirama notes: "our personalities differed ... and yet I sensed a mysterious kinship with him. I felt I knew why he'd come down to the river too"<sup>[16]</sup>.

In time we see Hashirama lose his brother, Kawarama, at just seven years old in battle. "It's just adults ganging up on and driving kids to their deaths! I know we're doing the same thing to the Uchiha clan"<sup>[17]</sup>. His father responds, "That is how we honour our opponents. Even an infant, if wielding a weapon, is deemed an enemy"<sup>[17]</sup>. Hashirama says that is no sign of honour and times are so bad you can't keep track of the deaths, we can't even say our family name! He goes into the woods to cool off accompanied by his brothers. They talk about the need for clans to make pacts and alliances if they truly want to minimise conflict, though there is no sign of that at the moment. Itama chirps up and says "But then ... what of our killed parents and siblings? What about our feelings towards our fallen comrades?"<sup>[18]</sup>. That's a good way to get yourself killed, and they fought for the continued survival and prosperity of their fellow clansmen, which peace facilitates. To maintain it is to fulfil their wishes. Itama's hair being dark and blonde was to signify the middle-ground, the compromise and balance which is killed early on illustrating the extremity of the times.

He goes to the river and sees Madara again, confiding in him that his brother died and by going to the river the haziness in his heart washes away. Madara tells him that he's lost siblings too and he also hopes to find a way in which neither side has to die: "It'd be where both sides revealed their guts, hid nothing from each other... and poured each other drinks and drank together like brothers. But that's impossible, cuz one can't really look

deep into someone's belly, down to their guts"<sup>[19]</sup>. He says he doesn't know the way to make it happen, but each time he comes to the river he makes a wish that one day the answer will come. It seems to be a universal prayer amongst Shinobi.

They began formulating a way forward, and every time they met they got a little closer. On the top of the cliff that would become the scene of many Hokage faces, they foretell of their future and the nature of their village. Madara can protect his brother from this vantage point, for he is the only sibling he has remaining<sup>[20]</sup>. It seems Hashirama has already conceptualised the basic structure: a school to teach Shinobi and a mission assignment structure based on abilities and mission requirements and so forth<sup>[21]</sup>.

He made a resolution that day, to endure for the sake of his vision. But one evening he comes back from seeing Madara and his father wants a word with him. He has looked into who this 'friend' is, and they're actually a member of the Uchiha. He may be tricking Hashirama trying to gain intel on the Senju and he may lower his guard around him and be killed. He must stop all communications, for the sake of his family. No wonder other Shinobi haven't made progress, are they going to go against the wishes of a family that has done everything to keep them alive?

I would hazard a guess that Madara must've had a similar grilling because his father and brother show up just as Hashirama's do at the river<sup>[22]</sup>. If his side of the story had been shown I'd bet that it was almost word for word the same interrogation, as people with such compulsion to fight don't think for themselves, and nobody apart from these two seem to take seriously the idea of cooperation. The two sides are ready to clash and a dejected Madara looks down at the ground and thinks this pipe dream just isn't reachable. These recurring moments by the river may have something to do with the

saying “No man ever steps in the same river twice. For it's not the same river and he's not the same man” - Heraclitus.

Years of ceaseless fighting go by, and both have become the Heads of their respective clan. Madara had erased Hashirama completely from his life<sup>[23]</sup> and diligently served in war, and the latter couldn't just do what Naruto did and chase after Sasuke, as those times were much more brutal and he had responsibilities as leader. “We were the furthest place possible from the dream I'd wanted to fulfil”<sup>[24]</sup>. Madara lost his brother to Tobirama in one of their clashes, and with Izuna gone he was looking to wipe the Senju off the map; and he's particularly sick of these offers for peace. “Hashirama! How long will you keep saying such juvenile things? It's just not possible to show our guts to each other don't you get it?”<sup>[25]</sup>.

After a battle that lasted a whole day, Madara's back finally touched the ground, and Tobirama was itching to kill him and finally take out the linchpin. But his brother refuses - nobody is allowed to touch him<sup>[26]</sup>, and it's the only time we see his murderous gaze turned on his own brother. He holds Madara as equally precious to him.

Even now, he thinks for a moment about the offer of creating a village, but he doesn't have a single brother left and just can't bring himself to trust this clan. Hashirama asks if there's *any* way he can prove himself to be sincere, and he replies: “Either kill your brother ... or kill yourself. Right now. And then we'll be even. I'd be willing to trust your clan”<sup>[27]</sup>. Hashirama thanks him for being kind enough to offer the option of taking his own life, rather than having to kill Tobirama. He has battled high-level Shinobi such as him so he knows the offer he's made is from deep within his heart; before signing off, he says that there will be no more fighting between Uchiha and Senju - and Madara must not be killed. He is moments away from piercing the Kunai into himself, when his friend grabs his hand: “Enough ... I have

now seen your guts”<sup>[28]</sup>. For a man who didn’t believe the dream could exist, and would happily let it wash away along with the river, he decides to give this a try.

“It was like a dream... Uchiha and Senju joined forces. There would no longer be mass casualties nor would the deaths of countless children be necessary anymore”<sup>[28]</sup>. Hashirama wants him to be Hokage as he would like him to accept all the villagers as his new siblings, though he says “me, who couldn’t even protect my own brethren?”<sup>[29]</sup>, which is the same thing he mentioned when they were on the exact same mountain top as children<sup>[30]</sup>; it was where he vowed to protect him, now looking over Konoha he knows he couldn’t keep that promise. Things haven’t been resolved, and it’s also an analogue of what Naruto said to Sasuke when they first met after two and a half years, “If someone can’t even save a friend, then I don’t think they deserve to be Hokage”<sup>[31]</sup>. A loss of belief in oneself, which as we see led to the abandonment of identity in Obito as well and thus the start of believing in nebulous, extreme solutions.

Madara’s distrust grows, and just before leaving the village he takes Hashirama down to the Nakano Shrine as he wants to show him the stone tablet. It reads: “One god, seeking stability, split into light and shadow. And it is these two polar opposites operating together that gives rise to all things in this universe”<sup>[32]</sup>. In short, the standard interpretation is that true happiness can be found when two contrary powers cooperate. But it could be interpreted differently, and Madara does choose to see it differently now. He had obviously read this transcription before but that was prior to him creating the village with Hashirama. Now he can see that with the Senju’s power he was able to resolve those disputes, which shall mean that to manifest his own goals he’ll need his cells; that’s why he took a bite out of him, never realising it would yield the Rinnegan and only confirm his interpretation of reconciling opposites this way.

These opposing forces give rise to all things, but what exactly *are* those things? Death, suffering, pain, loss, the vanquished along with the vanquisher, the victor must have a loser and so on. Thus whatever does arise in the dynamic of opposites creates a universal negative for every positive. It is up to Madara then to somehow create a universal monistic principle, free of the pangs of dualism, and it shall be done by allowing everyone to live on one side of this reality, within their own bubble that is.

He was spurred on to create an entirely new system after seeing the future path of a distrustful village-based structure, but upon asking for the support of his clan he didn't have a single person willing to come with him<sup>[33]</sup>. He embodies many aspects of the passionate but ultimately overbearing Mother that will do anything to protect the ones he cares for despite them feeling irked by his level of involvement. This is the path that the Uchiha have chosen and they want someone like Madara to campaign for their continued prosperity and integration with the village rather than immediately try and squander what progress they've made.

But this is a completely different kind of revelation in that he judges the nature of *reality* to be the root cause of suffering. This metaphysical realisation as given by his interpretation of the tablet calls for a different solution to the conflicts caused by Shinobi altogether. Just as Hashirama had already visualised in great detail what the village he imagined would look like, Madara has begun to cultivate a theory of dreams. Reality has conflict ingrained into it due to the constancy of opposites - dreams are the only thing which makes sense.

## A duel of opposites

Time has passed and Madara has come back to attack the village, just as Sasuke might do. This is one small step to universal salvation, and

Hashirama is pushed to the test again. This is their last and most symbolic battle as Madara has wrapped his Susanoo around the Nine-Tails, which is currently the highest symbol of hatred and disdain for mankind, whilst Hashirama summons the symbols of benevolence and cooperation. Just as Madara said, opposites lead to the creation of all things, and a lot of opposing dynamics are on display in this match.

The first one I would like to explore is the history of Japan's two most prominent Ninja clans: the Iga and the Koka, with the Uchiha being Iga and the Senju being Koka. There is certainly some evidence that Kishimoto is aware these clans existed and read about them, since his editor gave him the book *The Kougou Ninja Scrolls*, which is a fantasy novel depicting the two sides at war<sup>[44]</sup>. Originally the two clans were merely farmers and labourers who supplied wood to the jisha (temple-shrines), but come the time of the Kamakura period the demand for Warriors (bushi) rose. Whilst some clans continued to be regular workers, those of Iga and Koka began to train for military affairs and were used as mercenaries across Japan<sup>[34]</sup>. This is how the Senju and Uchiha became the strongest within their Land of Fire, as the more they were hired, the more they improved until it became a case of one hiring the Uchiha if another hired the Senju. Ironically, in real life the two clans became quite friendly as resources became less scarce, and they weren't known for intense rivalries.

In Iga tradition, it is said that Susanoo's efforts of slaying Yamata no Orochi was the birth of Shinobi no Jutsu, the arts of the Ninja<sup>[35]</sup>. Whilst non-canon, we see Indra come to lay waste to his home with the first incarnation of the Susanoo, and it was him who invented Ninjutsu and begun the lineage of the Uchiha; what's more, the fire so typical of this clan which we take as a given is also derived from the Iga, who were said to be the best at controlling and using this element<sup>[36]</sup>.

Come the formation of the Hidden Leaf, the Senju were the ones that began setting up democratic processes, whilst the Uchiha relied on family names and the strength of “Uchiha blood”. Likewise, the Koka ninja began to create a community(*sou*) which was used for management; decisions were made by lottery or majority vote, and everybody was basically equal. This structure worked because the people of Koka were composed of many small villages, which mirrors the community of the Senju, whereas no such dynamic was evident in Iga<sup>[37]</sup>.

Going one level up from clanhood now, we shall take a look at the religious symbolism present in the Uchiha and Senju; I hope you don’t mind that I focus on the latter as with the previous section we’ve covered all the main deities in Amaterasu, Susanoo, Izanagi/Izanami and sadly there aren’t many stories about Tsukuyomi that carry much mythological weight.

The Senju have predominantly Buddhist symbolism, with the stereotypical symbols of compassion, charity, meditation and so forth which counter the darker interpretations of Shinto in the Uchiha. All of them were crammed pretty tightly in this last fight against Madara, but each of Hashirama’s jutsu have distinct references.

Starting with his first jutsu *Choju Keibutsu, artefacts of the Buddha*<sup>[38]</sup>, the first bit translates to “Peak transformed buddha” which relates not to himself but to his *True Several-Thousand Hand* statue, Senju Kannon. Senju means “one thousand hands”, to which Kishimoto has used it to denote their multifaceted skill set as well as their compassion for others. The statue itself depicts the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, “represented with thousands of arms, which rise like the outspread tail of a peacock around him”<sup>[39]</sup>. His name means “lord gazes down at the world [in empathy]”, which is based on the fact that he could’ve gone up to nirvana, but chose to stay in Samsara and help the suffering instead. This is the inspiration for the Chinese

adaptation of this figure in Guan Yin, a female equivalent and with a slightly different translation of “Perceiver of the Sounds of the World”<sup>[40]</sup> as she heard the cries of those in pain. Hashirama would lend Madara an outstretched hand or a listening ear, regardless if they were at the river, on the mountain top or in the midst of battle.

He also used *Kakuan’s tenth edict on enlightenment*<sup>[41]</sup> which is based on the story of *Ten Bulls*; this is a series of short poems and accompanying drawings used in the Zen tradition to help describe the stages of a practitioner's progress toward enlightenment<sup>[42]</sup>. The Bull is said to be the eternal principle, truth in action, and the book lists the ways of taming it. The edict itself describes a sage who’s barefoot and wearing simple clothes, mingling with all the people of the world. He is blissful and uses no magic to extend his life, but rather gives his blessings so that dead trees become alive<sup>[43]</sup>. Hashirama mingles amongst the villagers and they wave to him; he’s happy to be just another person, and the last line I take to be metaphorically expressed, as his own Mokoton actually brings forth living organisms.

## The Story of a Veritable Prince

I shall end the exposition on these two by looking at one of the most popular tales in Hinduism: the story of the Ramayana. For those who haven't read the Epic, it's about a saintly prince called Rama who is the incarnation of the God Vishnu, born to defend his land from a terrible demon called Ravana who's captured his wife Sita.

Due to politics he was banished from his home by the craftiness of one of the King's partners, Queen Kaikeyi. As the coronation ceremony for Rama was being prepared, one of her maid-servants called Manthara caught wind of this and informed the Queen of this “terrible happening”. The reason she



considers it so is because Kaikeyi has a son, Bharata, who is equally qualified and now he won't have the chance to become King; but in actuality, nobody - him included - had a problem with Rama being the principal Hier, yet Manthara does her best to manipulate Kaikeyi to think of her own status, her son's legacy and so forth.

The maid-servant is described as a gloomy hunchback who spends most of her time in the darkness monitoring people, and she understands all the ins and outs of Kaikeyi's relationship to the King. Years ago she had saved him during battle, and it was there that he promised her two Boons(blessings) for her efforts. Manthara tells her now is the time to cash them in! The first will be the ascension of her son to the throne, and the second should be the expulsion of Rama into the forest. Initially the Queen is aghast at her recommendations, but she says she's just an innocent, caring soul dedicated to her welfare<sup>[44]</sup>.

This character I think lays the groundwork for what we see in Black Zetsu, since he too is someone that slithers across any point on the globe and listens in to people's conversations. He distorts information like the Stone Tablet<sup>[45]</sup>, tricks Madara and inflames wars just so Kaguya can be revived. It mirrors Manthara's approach to the Kingdom, as she is a devoted servant to Kaikeyi completely uncaring of the fact she is removing Goodness itself from the land.

Rama's subsequent adventure and dramatic final clash with Ravana is the main "spectacle" of the Epic, but it was due to a lowly maid-servant that it should come to pass; likewise, this narratological subtlety is at work in *Naruto* too, but many viewers considered it misplaced. In the Ramayana we were shown Manthara's trickery early on and her ties to the Imperial Lords, whereas we have no real knowledge of Zetsu's connection to Kaguya and the overlying structure only got articulated in the later chapters.

Character traits such as trickery and back-stabbing are well grounded, but as late as the Itachi and Sasuke fight he just seemed to be a glorified cameraman<sup>[46]</sup>.

There are also parallels between the characters of Rama and Lakshmana with Hashirama and his brother as well; when he got word that his brother was being banished from the Kingdom, Lakshmana was ready to follow him, but he was also ready to ignore the King's decree all together - even assassinate him if need be<sup>[47]</sup>. He has the same drive for stability above all else just like Tobirama, but his brother would not acquiesce to that way of thinking.

Rama had given the demon many chances<sup>[48]</sup> as all he wanted was to see Sita, and if Ravana surrendered he would take care of him without repose. In the end he does end up slaying him, as he's a demon that doesn't know right from wrong, no sense of Dharma, and a devotion to diabolical conduct<sup>[49]</sup>! But ours is a tale of *people*, not of concrete separations like demons and angels, and I wonder whether Rama would kill someone like Madara.

Come their last battle, Hashirama would find such resolve too, but this would be at the cost of giving up his principles of compassion. He kills his friend by stabbing him in the back<sup>[50]</sup>, which is the symbol of betrayal and superior cunning. He probably thought about the time they skipped stones as children because Madara blamed him standing behind him for his miss<sup>[51]</sup>, and when he went for a pee in the river, Hashirama spooked him and said "found a weakness"<sup>[52]</sup>; I wonder if he really used that moment of silliness against him.

Whilst Madara may wield the symbol of hatred, it is for all Uchiha past and present that he fights and aims to be their unifying force. Mentally he is

using love but executing it using hatred; inversely Hashirama has come to accept the village above all: "I am going to protect our, or rather, *my* village. No matter what it takes. I still believe to this day that protecting the village, shall lead to the protection of people, Shinobi and children. I shall not tolerate anyone who seeks to harm the village, be they friend, brother or even my very own child"<sup>[53]</sup>. It is said Guan Yin/Avalokiteśvara stayed in Samsara to help others, but in being mired in suffering Hashirama has begun to change from his caring and patient self, but Madara objects to his shift in *philosophy* the most: "you're mistaking the cause for the end, it shall someday lead the village... to darkness"<sup>[54]</sup>. This moment also represents the expulsion of the head of Shinto, and the era of imbalance despite Amaterasu's long association with Avalokiteśvara as equals<sup>[55]</sup>. Gone are the implementations of its ethics as well as the religion doesn't have absolutes, nobody is perfect<sup>[56]</sup>.

Their friendship had been grounded on one being able to see the guts of the other even if they were on different pages sometimes, and this Shinto idea of *makoto no kokoro*(heart of truth)<sup>[57]</sup> seems relevant; it corresponds to sincerity, regardless of the particular emotion one feels, and melds with the very nature of the Sharingan - the eyes which reflect the heart<sup>[58]</sup>. People might not like what they see, but that's the state of the Shinobi world; Madara has lost just as many people as Tobirama if not more, but just because the former's losses are etched into his face he brands him a kind of evil.

## A tale as old as tribe

It is here that the story between Hashirama Senju and Madara Uchiha comes to a close, but before concluding I want to add one more story - this time in the real world - which speaks to much the same dream of these two characters.

In the middle of the Fifteenth century there was a similar time of constant tribal warfare, moments of negotiated peace and then back to war. This was the moment of heightened bloodshed between tribes of the Native American peoples. But one man of Iroquois descent, called Deganawida, had a dream whereby tribes of all different origins would find a way to move past this undulating war and peace towards genuine prosperity.

He envisioned a union of all clans under one federation, but had to consolidate everyone of Iroquois origin first. In the book *The Tribes and the States* it talks of Deganawida conversing with a like-minded friend Hiawaitha on the actionable steps they can take to bring about peace. It's very reminiscent of the story of Hashirama and Madara being the two optimists that would find a way. In the book however it notes that Hiawaitha was the one who was the better orator and helped formulate Deganawida's dream, for he was slightly insane. To prove the conviction in his heart and to illustrate his belief in the federated system, he once climbed to the top of a tree and ordered the Mohawk tribe (one who initially opposed his plan) to cut it down so it would fall into the river. They did so, and watched him vanish into the leaves before crashing into the water. They didn't see him emerge and concluded he was dead, but unbelievably he was seen at the campfire the next day. This proof of conviction supposedly persuaded the Mohawk tribe to join the Iroquois federation, according to legend<sup>[59]</sup>.

What's more, Hashirama notes that other nations quickly adopted the same system, but that wasn't because they shared the same ecstasy he did of uniting all previously war-mongering clans, but they federated out of the need to survive a stronger opponent. As noted: "To nations outside the spread of the Iroquois empire, however, the rapid spread became alarming. In many cases they were forced to seek some plan of protecting themselves

as late as the last moment, when danger had already gone too far. The only successful procedure was the adoption of the enemy's tactics, and federate as the Iroquois did, meeting the menace with another federation"<sup>[60]</sup>. What's more, I can't say for certain but I doubt other clans in the Five Nations battled as regularly and as intensely as the wars between Uchiha and Senju.

Now then, Hashirama summarises his points and defines both village and Shinobi: "The village that Madara and I envisioned in the beginning is something that joined one clan to another. An invaluable cornerstone that created order out of chaos and then maintained it. It protected the children, averted pointless conflict and made peace a reality. Shinobi are those who endure for a purpose, but depending on what that purpose is, a Shinobi can change... just as both Madara and I did"<sup>[61]</sup>. Sasuke can see this in his brother, and he finds it ironic that a member of the Uchiha was one of the people in the Leaf who shared its Will of fire so closely. He has made up his mind, he won't let the village and Itachi become nothing<sup>[62]</sup>!

# 23

## Squad 7 Reunited

Sasuke makes it to the battlefield, and the first shock is that he's on the side of good, but arguably the bigger one is that he now wants to be Hokage and change the village<sup>[1]</sup>, but as Naruto knows from Itachi's words, he doesn't have a single person acknowledge that.

The Four Hokage set up a barrier and pin down the Juubi with some gracious deity gates mixed in, and this is where fission beings start getting released to try and protect the main body. Now is the chance for the specialised Allied Shinobi forces to tackle him for good, and we notice the manner of the war has shifted from companies and platoons, to more personal entities like village and clan; when they tried to immobilise Ten-Tails we saw the original squads from each village doing tag-team combinations like Ino-Shika-Cho<sup>[2]</sup>.

But the mightiest combination is right at the frontline as the three way deadlock has a new generation. Whilst Naruto and Sasuke work great from a technical perspective, by combining their attacks and matching chakra ratios<sup>[3]</sup>, they have a massive gulf between them in terms of philosophical beliefs and values: if the Juubi hadn't separated itself from the Amaterasu, what would Naruto have done then?

Meanwhile, Obito falls back out of the Kamui after fighting Kakashi, at his limits and a bloodied mess. Madara scoffs and sees that the pawn has exhausted its use - "time to make him Rinne-Rebirth me"<sup>[4]</sup>; whilst Black Zetsu tries to cover his body, he fails to stop Obito from completing the ritual, as he successfully got rid of the seal that Madara had put on him

when he was patched up all those years ago - his hair going white isn't from performing the rebirth jutsu as we suspected, but from turning into the jinchuriki himself, just as it would be for Madara.

## The prophet is here to help!

All that magnificent power which had previously been scattered and lacking precision is now focused in human form, though Obito is still being puppeted by it for the moment. He pulls apart the barrier and shakes off Hashirama's sage art, but hasn't awakened the Truth-seeker orbs or the Shakujo(Six-Paths staff)<sup>[5]</sup>. Peering into his psyche the current situation is dire as he's being torn apart by the beast's Will, the central portrait of him amongst Kakashi, Rin and Minato is being shredded too. But he's come this far for them and to survive he has to accept his identity<sup>[6]</sup> - thus this mission cannot succeed being "nobody". Unintuitively, this is a win for Naruto, as now it's possible to perform the Talk no Jutsu on him. There are heart-strings to pull on, but getting there is the challenge.

No longer the puppet of Madara, or the ragdoll of the Juubi, he is finally his own person and as a result of this consolidation the two truth-seeker orbs have become nine, with one morphing into the staff. He gets a host of new tools, including shaping the orbs into the Nunoboko which is the sword that Hagoromo supposedly used to create the world<sup>[7]</sup>, mirroring the world-shaping ability of Izanagi's Amenonuhoko, which he used to stir up the oceans and create the islands.

The truth-seeker orbs are ordinarily the mixture of all five chakra natures, but can be fused with Yin and Yang release<sub>1</sub> to create an expansive truth seeker orb, and Kaguya did something on this scale before her resealing<sup>[9]</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The system of five elements that also includes yin and yang is taken from the framework used in Onmyōdō - an ancient Japanese system for natural science, divination and astrology<sup>[8]</sup>

When merged with these two releases, they have the ability to nullify all ninjutsu, for what technical reason it isn't explained, but this is what Tobirama grasped when the damage to Edotensei bodies wasn't recuperating<sup>[10]</sup>. Interestingly, this negation wasn't the case prior to Obito's consolidation, as he hit Edotensei bodies with them and they were able to recover<sup>[11]</sup>.

The term truth-seeker(Gudo: 求道, "Seeking the Way") comes from Mahayana Buddhism, and is the path to Buddhahood. Mahayana itself translates to "The Great Vehicle" and is the means by which one attains enlightenment, which can only be done through ardent striving towards truth; however, Obito's proficiency with the Orbs, and how he can change them into a wide variety of different forms may have something to do with the saying "to bend the truth".

The rest of his appearance borrows heavily from Shugendo, which is an ascetic mountain religion native to Japan, being the syncretisation of Buddhism and Shintoism, with Taoist and Confucian elements. We see why Kishimoto placed this religion as the resource of choice for the Sage of Six Paths as they require one to hone both the power of Uchiha and Senju and all corresponding symbols.

The cloaks are based on Shugendo monks, and the Shakujo is carried with them when they walk along the mountain; the reason being is that they want to get closer to their founder, En no Gyoja, and use it to develop a kind of companionship<sup>[12]</sup>. Gyoja is often portrayed with this staff but its usage and meaning have stayed consistent across countries and religious branches, with Zen Buddhists using them as well; the Buddha instructed his disciples to carry one because all Buddhas of the past, present and future



will hold such a staff<sup>[13]</sup>. Now that Obito has an identity, he also has a lineage, and by taking in the Ten-Tails he has connected himself with the Sage, now situated in the line of prophets who can change the world, for better or for worse<sup>[15]</sup>.

The means shall be through the power of Ten-Tails, which also has Shugendo-inspired characteristics. Most prominently the Conch shell on its back when it's still in its preliminary forms<sup>[16]</sup>, as it's used as a trumpet in Shugendo ceremonies<sup>[17]</sup>; moreover, with the motifs of the trumpet and the way Ten-Tails is described in an apocalyptic sense, there is a lot of crossover with the Seven Trumpets in Christian Eschatology. They are what denote different levels of the apocalypse and how ever-increasing disasters occur, mirroring the biju bombs, then the cataclysm and then the Divine Tree. The Yokai I mentioned affiliated with Ten-Tails were linked to the mountains, which is the central spiritual symbol in Shugendo and the primary source of nature energy, thus its incorporation here is that the Ten-Tails Jinchuriki has harnessed the foremost spiritual energy of the religion and thus superseded nature.

How the Ten-Tails came to be revived is also born from two Buddhist practices: the Statue Filling ritual and the Eye-Opening ceremony, which have been included into Shugendo circles<sup>[18]</sup>. To perform the first, the statue must be hollow and have its eyes covered, for it is in the process of preparation. Now begins the insertion of specific sutras, rolls of tightly bundled text, from the head down to the base; the number of which, and any specific sutras depend on the statue itself. Once that is done, you can begin the Eye-Opening Ceremony, which will differ slightly depending on which branch of Buddhism it is, but commonalities will involve painting

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<sup>2</sup> In *Journey to the West*, Tripitaka is also bestowed a Nine-Ringed Monk's staff to assist on his journey, alongside the sealing hoops, as he journeys to become a bodhisattva<sup>[14]</sup>

the eyes of the statue and reciting the Lotus Sutra, as this consecrates everything from the head to the lotus throne<sup>[19]</sup>.

This may be why the Gedo Statue has been seen on a lotus in its dormant state<sup>[20]</sup>, as it had been filled with seven out of the nine tailed beasts. Indeed, the Gedo Statue in earlier moments of its summoning, like when Nagato used it, had bandages around its eyes<sup>[21]</sup>, indicating a lack of completion of the second ritual. Instead of using sutras, the Gedo statue is filled by exorcising the Tailed-Beast out of the Jinchuriki, which is another perversion of Shugendo, seeing that some practitioners became professional exorcists, usually for kitsune and tanuki<sup>[22][23]</sup>. What Obito practises truly is the antithesis of the Sage of Six Paths' original message: consecration of all chakra in one person, the individual above all, attainment of power as primary and so on.

Turning for a moment now to the history of Shugendo, it parallels the developing narrative of Ninshu and all later reincarnates. It was only just sprouting in the sixth century when Prince Hachiko fled into the mountains of Dewa province upon the assassination of his father, and from there devoted himself to a life of religious asceticism.

This was around the time that Buddhism reached Japan's shores, and Shintoism was still in its budding form, so for centuries the two had grown in tandem<sup>[24]</sup>. Their synthesis was typified in Shugendo all the way up until the Meiji Restoration(1868), where the 'Kami-Buddha Clarification Edicts'(*Shinbutsu Bunri* 神仏分離) were passed, which tried to force the separation of these two into separate forms of worship, separate temples and shrines and so forth<sup>[25]</sup>. This ravaged Shugendo and essentially outlawed its existence. The classification is mirrored in the births of Indra and Ashura as the genealogical separation of Shugendo into its component

parts, but eventually one or the other had to be picked for ninshu to continue.

Most Shugendo scholars tried to push the mountain religion into the sphere of Buddhism, precisely combinations of the Esoteric Shingon School and Mahayana Buddhism. By the 1920s, scholars feared a total extinction of Shugendo should academic efforts cease and the rest of society forget about them, so they published as much content as they could<sup>[26]</sup>. The restoration effort was spearheaded by Umiura Gikan, who was at one point (late 19th century) the chief monk of Engakuji Shugen temple; he implored Shugendo to align its position with that of Mahayana Buddhism<sup>[27]</sup>, which shows the same transfer of power from Hagoromo to Ashura. This however wasn't through external fears of government reprisal, but internal schisms that saw his formerly benevolent group abandon their core values, and through his younger son he had hoped this would reinstantiate Ninshu.

On the opposite end of the spectrum was the revival of a movement called *Haibutsu Kishaku* (abolish Buddhism and destroy Shākyamuni), where Shintoists called for the expulsion of Buddhism from Japan. This stance is taken by people like Indra who came back to destroy Ninshu, and Madara who returned to the Leaf to destroy the Senju, this being one particularly vociferous cycle of hatred amongst all the others. Madara had seen the rise of Buddhism and how it would come to overwhelm his brethren and was equally reticent of integration, articulating the feelings of some Shinto Priests advocating for the decree. It also seems to be similar to what Sasuke advocated for after killing Danzo<sup>[28]</sup>.

During wartime Shugendo had a resurgence in interest, with the reason being that it channelled the idea of the “Japanese spirit” and reinvigorated ideas of the sacred motherland<sup>[29]</sup>; the shamanistic and bucolic asceticism of

the monks had been reworked to fit War Propaganda in the same way that Ninshu and its original meaning is being contorted to push a war now.

Whilst Obito tries to pull Shugendo away from its roots, many symbols of the Uchiha, like the Tengu, are in fact incorporated into the religion and used as guides. Originally there had been some connotations with them being enemies of Buddhism<sup>[30]</sup>, but by the fifteenth century Shugendo practitioners(Shugenja) came to be referred to as Tengu<sup>[30]</sup>. During their time of reprisal, Shugendo monks disobeyed government sanctions and continued to practise, attesting to the same defiant spirit as the spirit itself. This is just speculation, but when Madara uncorked the full-body Susanoo and used the blade to cut the mountains<sup>[31]</sup>, I believe this represents the Tengu severing themselves from their duty as guides and revoking the original symbiosis between them.

The reason for their antagonistic framing was due to the natural disasters, political unrest, internal and external schisms within Buddhism around the Kamakura Period(1185-1333), and temples complained of people ignoring religious duties and siding with desire<sup>[32]</sup>. It was here that the concept of Tengudō emerged<sup>[33]</sup> as a realm where misbehaving monks were said to go after death, thus there was an incentive to get practitioners back in line.

This idea of them being vengeful spirits which would bring chaos to anyone that caused them harm<sup>[34]</sup> is very much in line with Sasuke's righteousness, but instead of Naruto seeing him as an enemy he will do unlike the Buddhist practitioners of his time and set the example of compassion. So strong is the Mahayana Buddhists adherence to this giving that scholars had to reinterpret the Four Fundamental Truths, as the third is cessation of all things and letting go, but practitioners make it their mission to *stay* in Samsara and lend a hand to others. It is said that to attain

nirvana is not actually to leave the conditioned world(Samsara), but to pervade it with one's love for others<sup>[35]</sup>.

It wasn't long ago that Naruto could feel a sense of total isolation, without a single person to share anything with, and close to justifying causing others harm, but luckily he's seen what people can do together and how much they can resolve. There is no need to construct distant realms like the Tengudō, nor is the Pure Lands for reincarnating the only way to revive the current world.

This is what drives the ethos behind a 20th century movement called "Humanistic Buddhism" pioneered by Tàixū<sup>[36]</sup>, and it takes some inspiration from the aforementioned principles of Mahayana and Christianity. It tries to change the reputation of Buddhism in the eyes of educated young Chinese who see Buddhist thought as being centred on emptiness and pessimism in regards to the Human Realm<sup>[37]</sup>.

Buddhism could be interpreted this way, if one feels the empty side of emptiness so to speak<sup>[38]</sup>, but the fruitful nature of emptiness is expressed succinctly by the Taoists in their canonical *I Ching*: "The thirty spokes unite in the one nave; but it is on the empty space (for the axle), that the use of the wheel depends. Clay is fashioned into vessels; but it is on their empty hollowness, that their use depends. The door and windows are cut out (from the walls) to form an apartment; but it is on the empty space (within), that its use depends"<sup>[39]</sup>.

During their fight, Obito showed Kakashi the hole in his heart<sup>[40]</sup>, but this wasn't as a sign of potential to blossom, as an abode for friends and relationships, but a wound inflicted by the world for just Being. The process of becoming a nobody is an emptying endemic to all and the only way in which that hole can be filled is with dreams. But to be more precise,

dreams are the *vehicle* for salvation, and he shall mix its symbolism with the significance it holds in Buddhism, for the moon is said to symbolise the Third Noble Truth - cessation of suffering<sup>[41]</sup>.

But Obito and Naruto diverge at the *reason* for enduring<sub>3</sub>, as the former says he will not kill those that surrender, a message which falls on tender ears - "that's right. You don't have to fear death or keep enduring any more pain. You'll be entering a dream"<sup>[44]</sup>. Hashirama tells them not to give up, but this doesn't speak to the current dilemma: why keep fighting for the chance that we succeed when I can surrender and definitely be placed under the dream?

For Naruto, the collapse of Shinobi is the end of generations of hard work by *people*, and he doesn't want to throw away the past and the potential futures of many away. This is why he reignites his chakra to flood the memories of his childhood into everyone's mind, as now it's not about telling them, it's about showing why he would rather be here with them. The fresh pain of losing a dear friend, compounding the loss of his parents and mentor - should he not be the first in line to jump in and see them again?

It is here that Hashirama also takes a moment to show them his memories of the very first Gokage summit. He was filled with great joy despite other Kage seeing it as merely a transactional agreement for distributing the Biju<sup>[45]</sup>. To Hashirama it signified something more, that people were finally coming together, and as Onoki comments it was the meeting that ended minor conflicts<sup>[46]</sup>. The Hidden Sand didn't want another Tailed-Beast but were making much more outlandish demands about sharing arable land,

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<sup>3</sup> This world, as composed of cycles of life and death in Samsara, is also called the Sahā world - "the world to be endured". A world in which people must endure suffering<sup>[42][43]</sup>. This is how the idea of Shinobi (that of "perseverance") has cleverly become the symbol which synergises with Buddhism to liberate oneself.

having other nations pay compensation to them for holding more than one Biju and so on. Other Kage basically laughed at him and said the other four leaders will just gang up on you and crush your village<sup>[47]</sup>.

Hashirama accepts that he has no idea if this treaty and this momentary peace will last, if things won't just go back to the way they were, but nevertheless he hopes "that some time in the future... There'll come a day when Shinobi will collaborate and help each other with one heart, regardless of their affiliation. *That* is my dream of the future"<sup>[48]</sup>. It was against Madara where he said "our, or rather, my village"<sup>[49]</sup> but in this speech he corrects himself the other way - "all of my, our, beloved children"<sup>[50]</sup> as his care for everyone has been revived too. Up to this point they have shared battle plans, weaponry, chakra and now feelings and memories, but when will they understand that they share the same dream? Little by little, the realisation that unity is possible will be articulated and Naruto will be there, be it for his friend, foe or very own child.

## The Divine Tree

Resembling much of the Jubokko Yokai, it is a tree which grows from the blood of slain warriors, and the Fourth Databook notes the divine tree also absorbs the blood of dead ninja<sup>[51]</sup>. "Jubokko wait for unsuspecting humans to pass underneath their branches. When somebody gets close enough, they attack, snatching their prey with long, jagged, finger-like branches, and hoisting it into their boughs"<sup>[52]</sup>. This process of absorption is just the beginning, with the Ten-Tails being the initial stage and the Divine Tree the final form<sup>[53]</sup>.

Upon its rebirth, Madara tells the tale of the Divine Tree as inscribed on the Uchiha stone tablet: that it's merely trying to reclaim the chakra we humans stole from it; in truth this isn't the Will of the Divine Tree but

Kaguya's, as she believes it has been "stolen" from her as Zetsu articulates a bit later. Madara goes on to detail the life of the Princess as the first one to taste the fruit, yielding the power to stop the war and going on to bear a child who possessed chakra inside him. His name was Hagoromo Otsutsuki. The man known as the Sage of the Six Paths who stopped the Ten-Tails from running amok<sup>[54]</sup>. He concludes with his interpretation of events, that the forbidden fruit didn't bring about an end to conflict, if anything it started the cycle of global wars we see now.

His solution for reconciliation using the power of the tree isn't unique, as Jung's analysis of the Mother archetype shows; the unconscious state of present day man who is stuck between a rock and a hard place, namely the past that is no more and the future which is yet to be, will feel abandoned by this world and use the symbol of the Cosmic Tree to try and base his existence<sup>[55]</sup>. The section goes on to say that the tree reaches up to the heavens, with descriptions of the Nordic World Tree Yggdrasil having its roots burrow down to Hell. Whilst the Divine Tree isn't on this scale it does incorporate some of their properties. For example, Obito weaponised the roots into dragons which assaulted the Allied Shinobi<sup>[56]</sup>, which may be an adaptation of the dragon Nidhogg who gnaws at the roots of Yggdrasil; Nidhogg lived below the Earth in the realm of Náströnd, similar to Hell. It would eat the bodies of all the people that had gone there and been entwined with the roots on account of doing evil deeds.

The origin of the word 'Yggdrasil' I shall warn you is a graphic one, as 'Ygg' is in reference to one of Odin's epithets as 'The Terrible One' and represents his persona as God of the Hanged. Drasil is an ancient term for 'horse', and the combination of the two is a metaphor for the way the body rocks under a gallows tree<sup>[57]</sup>. This was a passage between life and death the same way that Yggdrasil connects the heavens and hell. Again, the



gallows-men being the very people that would end up contributing to the formation of the mandrake-homunculus in alchemical practice.

Ordinarily, hanging will denote the end of conscious awareness, but mythologically speaking when this act coincides with the World Tree it represents a turn back to the unconscious, and for Odin this was just the beginning. In one his most famous tales it describes his fascination for the Runes, which are a type of magical alphabet where even just writing with these characters could invoke special abilities. He was seized by that desire to write an idea and make it manifest, but to acquire that would mean nothing short of his own death. Whenever someone normally makes a sacrifice to him, the person has to be both strangled and stabbed at the same time, which is what Odin did to himself; for nine days he suffered in the piercingly cold wind, under the tree of Yggdrasil with a spear in his side, becoming more dead than alive, until the thing he wished for all along showed itself. It was a sacrifice not only of himself but to himself, and now like a man reborn he continued to accomplish what other Gods thought were beyond them, becoming Odin the Wise<sup>[58]</sup>.

Cutting himself off the tree is the act of separating himself from nature and becoming an individual with an ego that is aware of itself. Whenever we hear the word ego nowadays it is usually referencing the undeveloped, childish and destructive results of poor integration - remaining as separate to the person as if it were still unconscious. It continues in symbolic form and sees expression through deities of war, love, hatred relative to the point of the personality needing to be consolidated. The weaker the ego the more of one's experience will be projected upon the group<sup>[59]</sup>. What's more, this group instinct for non-differentiation is typified in the Apophic desire to swallow up the sun and return to the primordial oneness, or as Neumann calls it - "the pre-egoid unity of uroboric containment"<sup>[60]</sup> which is the very serpent-like nature that someone like Odin had to master to become

self-consistent. Comparatively, in the manga we see the same thing happening when Guy opens the Eighth Gate and sacrifices himself not just out of the desire to do so, but because he has satisfied his own self-rule, first expressed by his father: “to protect something precious enough to give your life for”<sup>[61]</sup>. This is what stops the ego cowering in solitude and seclusion, as love beckons the highest form of agency.

Odin had articulated his dream and entered into the collective Ouroboros to visualise it, as it is in dreams that we revert to this stage of the psyche<sup>[62]</sup> before the one of separation to manifest it. This theme is relayed in Naruto words, when he says to Obito: “We’ll sleep tomorrow, dreaming our own dreams!”<sup>[63]</sup> in the spirit of the individual, but now comes the necessary enduring through Samsara.

The final mapping of Norse mythology will be to thread it with the Buddhist ideas of suffering and broaden our own understanding of Hell. Starting etymologically, the word has a long line of derivations from the Old Norse Hel, to the Proto-Germanic Haljō meaning hidden place, and finally the Proto-Indo-European Kel, meaning “to cover, conceal, save”<sup>[64]</sup>. Additionally, the Greek word Calypso, rooted in kalyptein, also has the same meaning to conceal and is derived from the same PIE word Kel. This is where we get apocalypse from as it is *Apo-calypso*, which is to uncover, reveal and so forth. This moment of apocalypse is called Ragnarok in Norse myth and marks the advent of the worst demons, natural disasters and the submersion of the world in water.

To alert the Gods of the day it would come was Heimdall, who sat at the border of Midgaard(Earth) and Asgaard(Land of the Gods). Should it arrive, Heimdall would blow the Gjallarhorn and alert the Gods for battle. Interestingly, this same horn is used in the well spring of Mimisbrunnr, or “Well of Memory” as the God of Wisdom Mimir will use it to drink water

from the well and gain secret knowledge<sup>[65]</sup>. In the *Prose Edda*, this was where Odin went to ask for some himself, but Mimir wouldn't hand him such wisdom so easily - he had to give something precious in return.

He demanded that Odin sacrifice one of his eyes, for it was a fair exchange to receive knowledge from this Well<sup>[66]</sup>. He handed it to Mimir and was given a full Gjallarhorn of wisdom, and the eye thereafter infused into the Well. So we're starting to see the importance of memory and the wisdom that results from journeying through Hell. For Obito, he moves out of being a demon when he can remember who he really was, for everything which previously covered himself has gone, and he comprehends his true nature, just as Itachi had said when speaking to Kisame: "No matter who you are... you do not know what kind of human you are until the very end. One realises one's true nature at the moment of death. Don't you think that's what death is about?"<sup>[67]</sup>. Naruto isn't telling Obito to be "Obito Uchiha" as a kind of regress to the status quo, as the path to understanding oneself is the most rugged path of them all. It requires nothing less than a kind of death of the self, but can you stomach your own apocalypse? This will coincide with finding your purpose, and the role that Obito was willing to play was the blanketing of such things for the instigation of the Infinite Tsukuyomi - the ultimate Hell as we can see now, which fits its original title as the Nightmare Realm<sup>[68]</sup>.

Once the journey through hell is done, and everything has been pulled out then Naruto lends a hand to the person at the bottom, for if he tries to help anyone above he is only fanning the flames. This is why he fights someone until they are totally exhausted and have nothing left to give. Conversely, this is why when Hagoromo tries to give strength to Sasuke, in an attempt to mend the preferential treatment among siblings, he is not helping as it fuels his ability to create a new system of Shinobi.

## The Spirit Tree

As I mentioned that Obito has been spurring the equal and opposite development in unity, we finally see the counterpart to the Divine Tree. It began to form when Naruto connected his chakra to myriad different members of the Allied Forces, able to mould himself to find compatibility, and the leafs are extremely diversified compared to the impending homogeneity<sub>3</sub>.

Naruto connects right through the populace and develops these Ninshu-like bonds, with this sharing of chakra helping them on multiple occasions<sup>[69]</sup>, but also spurring the drive in every Shinobi to make connections upward beyond their clan, village and up to the entire army in turn. Now they repay the favour, jumping down to help Naruto in a game of tug-of-war that will decide the future path of humanity.

Kakashi hopes Obito can understand the reason for their collaboration: “Obito... When people see someone trying twice as hard as others [...] they instinctively start wanting to lend a hand. That’s because people eventually learn that they only have each other to fill the holes in their hearts”<sup>[70]</sup>. The Spirit Tree has officially taken shape and we catch a glimpse of its roots<sup>[71]</sup>: people finding chakra from Naruto’s main trunk or someone like Minato’s, now they’re no longer keeping pace but in firm advantage!

It is now that Naruto enters the Talk no Jutsu realm and through their chakra linkage he saw all the images he had of being Hokage, with his face carved onto the mountainside<sup>[72]</sup>. You can change goals as many people have, but Naruto will inspect whether your heart and your words line up,

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<sup>4</sup> Using the language of the two different kinds of Homunculus, it would stand to reason that the Divine-Tree represents the Homuncularisation of people into nutrients, whereas the Spirit Tree represents the second kind, that of the purification of the soul.

and this time he paces around him<sup>[73]</sup>, unrelentingly questioning his beliefs as all this time Obito had been testing his resolve. He admits that what he's doing is no different from a Hokage's actions, but he's been able to surpass that title by offering *world peace*<sup>[74]</sup>. All of Naruto's ideas are just too uncertain, with so many ifs and should he falter what then? "Anyone would choose a shortcut with a fixed outcome. That's right...the goal a Hokage ought to aim for is world peace"<sup>[75]</sup>.

In concrete Buddhist terms, this is a battle of self-power(jiriki) and other-power(tariki) that reifies these ideas of a humanistic Buddhism and represent two paths to enlightenment, the "path of easy practice"<sup>[76]</sup> and "path of difficult practice", with the latter being known as the way of Sages<sup>[77]</sup>. This ties in with what Naruto says to Obito about becoming Hokage: "What I want to know isn't the easy path... but how to navigate the rugged one"<sup>[78]</sup>.

It seems that the idea of Hokage has scaled as Obito realised what is a logical extension of Itachi's actions: for an Uchiha individual to understand the workings of their clan, they would need to grasp their relationship to the village, and change couldn't come without their being productive conversation between the two; but then to develop the best relationship with the village you have to understand how other nations put pressure on the Leaf, as was the case for the Hyuga. Then you come to despair, for world control must be the only way to stabilise what is the global root of inequities, and this reaches back down to the individual where minds need to be lateralized. But this is only the solution if there is just one person who can correct the system! Naruto stands before Obito with a better way to address all that, and he occupies a central symmetry in being surrounded by *everyone* to participate in his plight, as Kakashi had said of his gift: "Naruto possesses a special power. Without exchanging many words, he can strike up a friendship with anyone"<sup>[79]</sup>.

If you govern by seeking to employ the dominion of oneself instead, as Sasuke is trying to do with his Egyptian Symbolism of Osiris, then the principles dictated in the *Book of the Dead* such as “I am yesterday, today and tomorrow”<sup>[80]</sup> becomes a form of omnipresence under his iron fist rather than a fact across all Kings. This is why Naruto is at the helm of the Spirit Tree, because he succeeded where many have failed as his conversational abilities serve as the bridge between the individual and the wider collective ideal of Ninshu; even though there is the loser, the vanquished and the lonely, this has become the one other tool in addressing the pangs of dualism.

People had given up on genuine communication, and thus Hagoromo’s dream, because of the hole in one’s heart that Obito spoke of, and the symbols of meaninglessness and separation. Friends are necessary to aid in the recovery, but they cannot be given to you, nor can anyone but you address this pain. This personal Hell upon an individual is precisely what makes them reject Ninshu before it can even begin since it cannot aid in self-understanding, as Madara seems to imply: “The sage’s actions ended up merely furthering the human paradox. And even if some managed to connect hearts, all they learned was that true understanding was impossible”<sup>[81]</sup>.

This was the Sage’s fundamental naivety, as he said himself this creed was meant to birth hope<sup>[82]</sup>, but as we know from the myth of Pandora when she opened that box, the very last thing to come out after all the hatred, disease and evil was hope. Pandora, being the first woman in Greek mythology and an analogue of Eve in Judaism and Christianity<sup>[83]</sup> also unleashed evils upon humans. So in birthing hope he also birthed all evil and yet with no mention that this also necessitated the striving and enduring that people would need to surpass it.

Naruto's gift is what completes the puzzle, and answers questions like "Why would I link myself to begin with, when they know nothing about my pain?", "Why wouldn't I do it all myself?" and so on. Through Hell, the individuals who coalesce into a "Ninshu network" could now stomach the threat of negation, loss and even betrayal. In the case that someone like Sasuke leaves the village, you won't see anyone trying to kill him but find a way to understand him. Without this ability to converse we saw the shift in perspectives of people like Kiba, Neji, Shikamaru - all men willing to sacrifice their life to make sure he could return the first time around, now calling him a bastard and a traitor. All this reveals is that they only love the "Shinobi" in themselves or the "Leaf" in themselves and beyond that they could be scared by their own potential for darkness.

Naruto's conversation with Obito continues, showing his old friendship with Rin and how "you know, Rin, you saving me... is the same as you saving the world"<sup>[84]</sup> which is a clear adaptation of one of Jung's most famous quotes: "If you take a personal problem seriously enough, you will simultaneously solve a social problem" and by doing what it takes to become Hokage, he wanted to stop the ongoing war and help the village. Thus inversely, seeing that Rin wouldn't watch over what he has now become is proof that he has strayed from his original goal: the one who wanted to address problems through connection, because he thought this wasn't feasible. He switched because he equated Rin with the spirit of hope in the same literalising manner that Sasuke has done with his own symbolism, but if he can come to believe the spirit is not dead he may be able to accept that he and his ideals have lost.

Crashing to the ground, he is about to watch Kakashi put an end to him, when Minato interjects and says all the lecturing that Naruto did should've been *his* job as a friend, as he's the one that understands him<sup>[85]</sup>; more precisely, Kakashi is the other half of him that somehow managed to stay

on the path of good when he could've been just the same: "I've thought this world was hell too, I thought I'd lost you... and then lost Rin right after that. And later Master Minato as well. Even though I don't know anything for sure... I tried my best to see the world with this eye"<sup>[86]</sup>, and this is when he says that his words were a crutch despite losing his last light and hope too. Remember, he had a very brief, if non-existent, relationship with his mother and his father killed himself before he even started the academy. His teammates were the last thing that reignited those familial bonds.

That's why he supports someone like Naruto, and attests to the fact he won't fail as much as Obito, because "if he starts to trip and stumble, *I'll* help him [...] Because he'd never give up on his dreams, or reality. That's the kind of guy he is. And the way he lives his life draws others to him [...] *that's* the difference"<sup>[87]</sup>. Obito can see his old self, he can hear Rin's words and he realises how sad Madara's philosophy is as he broke people and demoralised them into collaborating with him.

This is where Naruto climbs atop the divine tree and spins up a rasenshuriken to aim at Madara, but from Obito's eye it looks like the Spirit Tree has finally bloomed<sup>[88]</sup>. He had always been behind or at pace, but now his way is higher, brighter than anything he has seen before. There he is, shining brightly like the star we wish upon. This idea of the guiding star is in *Pinocchio* too when Geppetto wishes upon it for his marionette to become conscious, which is present at the very start of the film, and this would've been the beginnings of a new life if not for one final thread.

Black Zetsu succeeds in covering his body and redirecting the Rinne-Rebirth to revive Madara<sup>[89]</sup> and all of the good work of Naruto and the Allied Forces has led to even greater evil. Obito has not atoned for anything, right now it looks like he's made things much worse.



# 24

## Endgame

With a single Rinnegan and the Gedo Statue, Madara is able to stun and capture every single tailed beast<sup>[1]</sup> and we wonder why it was so easy, but this method of statue-filling deliberately negates any opportunity for teamwork; if it could only chain one at a time it would allow the Bijū to focus efforts on liberation, but here Kurama can only spill the briefest of battle plans to Gaara before being separated. Once it was Naruto who saved him from the darkness, now he has a chance to repay that debt.

He finally makes it to Minato and just as he's about to transfer the Nine-Tails over, slippery Zetsu jumps out of the ground and absorbs him before sinking back to Obito<sup>[2]</sup>. This little motif of "the snake stealing the jewel in a moment of weakness" is repeated, both here and in mythical stories; Gilgamesh for example lost the plant of rejuvenation he had swam to the depths of the ocean to retrieve when he took a brief moment of relaxation<sup>[3]</sup>. In this case, the Good are also naive and this vulnerability has been exploited to direct power back into Madara's hands. The ritual is raced through as he becomes the second incarnation of the Sage, and he has no problem accepting his identity or tussling with Ten-Tails: the complete form is assumed - save for one left eye<sup>[4]</sup>.

As Madara joins the battlefield, Obito wants to know what he saw in him all those years ago. After realising the failure to save the world through adopting an identity, he questions whether Madara genuinely wanted him to dissolve himself, or whether that name is a symbol representative of a philosophy. The answer turns out to be both: "You are Madara. Madara is he who rejects this world. All who hold that thought in their heart and

strive toward achieving the Infinite Tsukuyomi are Madara"<sup>[5]</sup>; however, even though Obito was meant to be the replica, he was adamant that he be the one to complete the mission and deliver mankind from its suffering - but if he has inherited his namesake, what difference would it make if the world is "saved"? In actuality, the designation is used to render all things in different shades of his likeness, but only *he* is the name and symbol, thus from that standpoint it only makes sense for him to take centre-stage.

This might've come as a shock, but the same logic can be seen when Obito had declared: "a single world that belongs to nobody. One perfect world without war or ill feelings. It is only within a single collective consciousness, where the individual has been cast aside that the truth can be found!"<sup>[6]</sup>. But when asked who he was he replies "nobody. I don't want to be anybody. I just want to fulfil Project Tsuki no me"<sup>[7]</sup>. Now you see the problem. Obviously he doesn't notice, but he had to be the exception to being nobody the same way he couldn't really suffice being "Madara" for Madara. He even stated that he would be the exception when declaring war at the Gokage summit: "By controlling them all, I shall unify the world! I shall create a world with no bad blood, no wars. Everything will become one with me, and be united together"<sup>[8]</sup>. It also confirms the feelings Obito had when he said "I've *never* really considered you a comrade"<sup>[9]</sup>, so he knows it wasn't just him distancing himself, seeing people in that light made it mutual.

Can Madara really say this worldly rejection started with him? Indeed, if you look at Hashirama or Naruto they also "reject this world" in a way, though the last thing they'd want is to have someone wear them like a costume. Naruto leaves all the time when speaking with his father, mother, Obito as he enters a small and temporary psyche plane where they say what they need to before returning. The work doubles-back and enriches the material world however it need be, whereas Madara was willing to attack

the village, stab through the crest of his clan<sup>[10]</sup>, kill Obito and all things if necessary, as that's what happens when you rely on power. The reason he does so he says himself: "Power is only the ability to make things happen"<sup>[11]</sup>, not some ridiculous idea called love - for that was tried with Ninshu and it failed miserably.

## The Sage emerges

A lot of conditions have lined up for them to meet this cleanly, and though the intricacies aren't known it seems to be a different dynamic whether you are going to correspond to the Yin or Yang half of Hagoromo's consciousness. For Sasuke he now has Hashirama cells via Kabuto and chakra from Hashirama before he died, which is the same thing that spurred Madara's awakening of the Rinnegan, and the reason he *retains* his Rinnegan as well. Both of them correlate to the different aspects of the sage, with Naruto representing his heart and the spirit of Ashura, whereas Sasuke represents the "blade" and the spirit of Indra. But the two of them also fulfil the other definition of Shinobi, that of endurance, as they have continued on despite countless obstacles. Madara noted a similar thing when he sensed his Mangekyo: "That you possess such eyes proves you have continued to seek something despite many great losses"<sup>[12]</sup>, and Naruto's heart has continued to grow thanks to many great friendships.

The names Indra and Ashura are derived from Hinduism, with the root word for Indra being "to kindle" or to "ignite"<sup>[13]</sup> as he was known as "the radiant one"<sup>[14]</sup>, though there are alternative translations<sup>[15]</sup>. He was quite a handful at birth to say the least, as he refused to be born the normal way and chose to emerge from his mother's side<sup>[16]</sup>. After that he went to Tvaṣṭar and managed to steal the soma, drinking so much that it made him unparalleled in strength<sup>[17]</sup> and eventually the leader of Svarga(Heaven). It may be a link to Sakura's earlier comments about Sasuke after they crossed

paths in early Shippuden, believing he had been using drugs and forbidden jutsu to accelerate his development<sup>[18]</sup>.

Like Sasuke, Indra possesses a heroic yet tyrannical nature, and his ways are said to be rough, his primary attribute is power and he's not afraid to shake the world to its foundations<sup>[19]</sup>. Being noted as the God of Storms, he also seems to share a similar temperament to Susanoo as he has been called impetuous at times<sup>[20]</sup>; the thunderstorm itself regarded as the space between heaven and earth<sup>[21]</sup>, and the shamanistic power of Susanoo to traverse between realms also solidifies these aspects; what's more, Sasuke has begun some kind of intercession with other realms, first with the Underworld of the dead Kage and now with the Sage in the Pure Lands.

Now for the other side in the Asuras. A word that correlates to "titan, demigod or anti-god" depending on the proclivity, the good ones follow the God Varuna, whilst the despotic ones follow Vritra. It is said that in the older Indian Rigveda, Asura applied to beneficent deities, but by the time of the late Vedic texts it strictly refers to hostile and demonic forces<sup>[22]</sup>. Confusion begins to mount when you consider some of the Vedic hymns which used the word *asura* could be invoking Indra<sup>[23]</sup>, as the term had some overlap with the concept of kingship. These schisms in etymology eventually settled into stable categories, and the devas and the asuras did perpetual battle, with the Devas winning but only barely<sup>[24]</sup>. Now we have this battle mirrored by the introduction of reincarnations.

This may be why Kishimoto decided to use these two names for the Sage's sons since they encapsulate both sides of good and evil in each one; moreover, Indra is the one who rules by himself and his own might, whilst there isn't a single Asura as such, it is a class of beings, denoting the power of the Many in Ashura as well.

Whilst I can't speculate historically for the changing usage of the word to refer solely to evil beings, we can get a window into their *psychology* by reading commentary on the Isha Upanishad - that until we know the Self, we will always live as an asura<sup>[25]</sup>. Both of our protagonists have stripped away these impediments and rapidly approach two sides of the same coin, so does this mean reconciliation is on the horizon?

The greater the number of opposites that can be maintained between any two reincarnations, the closer they get to the images of Indra and Ashura; Madara and Hashirama were from different clans, with separate philosophies, cultures and livelihoods but they managed to consolidate these as children, and once more with the formation of the village as adults. Both of them could see and understand parts of the other more than any prior, but they couldn't get past a certain contradiction - that of the village.

Eventually there will be those who disagree on Reality itself, which our penultimate pair had no means of reconciling; it'll be up to Naruto and Sasuke (this iteration of meta-individuals) to work through the final echelon of cosmic combat<sub>1</sub>. The answer is beginning to rear its head, for Indra and Ashura to cease they will have to integrate their eventual contradictions on Being and accept the result.

Madara is unparalleled in his striving, consolidating more of his opposing reincarnate than anyone else, even integrating his very cells to awaken the Rinnegan. Subsequently, Hagoromo says "Now, no longer Indra's reincarnate, he's obtained Ten Tails power and is getting close to me"<sup>[27]</sup>, showing it isn't a facet which is tethered to his Being.

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<sup>1</sup> Erich Neumann notes the dynamic of the Twin-Brothers in myths, and their separation coupled with reconciliation marks an important stage for the conquering of the Ouroboros, the transcendence of the Apophic instinct, and the concretisation of ego consciousness<sup>[26]</sup>

It was predicted by the sage long ago that Indra or one of his incarnations would become significantly possessed with power enough to understand how to maximise it<sup>[28]</sup>, which is why he wrote the Stone Tablet for the Uchiha to try and address any potential problems; but Zetsu obviously thought this could be a possibility and made modifications. Additionally, the Fourth Databook confirms what we see in the filler arc of Indra and Ashura: “Black Zetsu tempted Indra and instilled in him a burning hatred for his father and younger brother. Denying Ninshu and driven by his own genius, he invented ninjutsu and challenged his younger brother”<sup>[29]</sup>. The linking between people stopped because the issues within the individual pertained, and all it takes is a couple hand signs to calibrate oneself, which motivates the outcast and disenfranchised especially in promising no need to address that psychological pain.

The system of hand-signs that Indra developed is taken from the art of Kuji Kiri, seen in traditions like Shugendo, and translates to “The Cutting of the Nine Signs”. It has nine select hand-seals for assisting meditative practice and one can use them for supporting mantra recitation; where the cutting comes in is that the practitioner(*majutsushi*[pure-art-user<sup>[30]</sup>]) will use their bare right hand, or with a sword, and envisage a 4 by 5 grid by cutting rows and columns in the air.

Once the grid is formulated, the idea is that the *majutsushi* will draw a symbol onto it which will serve as the locus for new information, hopefully being impressed into reality and altering its structure<sup>[31]</sup>. As you can see power is implied in the dynamics of Kuji Kiri with the express aim of removing disruptive influences<sup>[32]</sup>, which can go very wrong very quickly.

That is why these hand signs are subsidiary to a larger spiritual apparatus like Hinduism or Buddhism. For Shingon Buddhism in particular, symbolic meaning has been assigned to each hand: the left had symbols of Truth, the

Finite and Phenomenal realm and the Moon, whereas the right had symbols of Wisdom, the Buddha-realm and the Sun<sup>[33]</sup>; not a step is out of place in terms of the bestowing of power from Hagoromo to the two reincarnates, with Sasuke and Naruto having the same correspondence<sup>[34]</sup>.

Moving into more speculative utilisations of mudras now, I shall start from the moment they are bestowed power by the sage<sup>[35]</sup>, and the spirit is displaying an open-palm gesture, which corresponds to this one of granting protection<sup>[36]</sup>. The two of them are being given power from the symbolically masculine impulse in Hagoromo who broke free from Mother, and now it is up to Naruto and Sasuke to prevent the same thing from happening once more.

When they seal away Kaguya, the spirit that's behind them places its hands palm to palm at the breast which is called the *gasshō* mudra, which represents the unity of the Phenomenal world with the eternal Buddha Realm<sup>[37]</sup>: the consolidation of reality in Sun and Moon. And lastly, if you're not already asleep, there is another called the Mudra of Six Elements, or the Wisdom Fist mudra. I bring it up because it looks practically identical to the *rat* hand sign that Naruto and Sasuke use to break the Infinite Tsukuyomi<sup>[38]</sup>, the only difference being that the Buddha Dainichi Nyorai only uses his left index finger<sup>[39]</sup> though the correct Mudra is shown at the end of that chapter<sup>[40]</sup>. It is meant to symbolise the unity of all five of the worldly elements with spiritual consciousness/mind<sup>[41][42]</sup>, which is what happens when everyone in the Infinite Tsukuyomi is released.

## Sun and Moon rejoin the battlefield

Naruto uses his panoply of tailed beast chakra to sever the Divine Tree, but in doing so only accelerates the rate that all this power becomes centralised. In absorbing it Madara realises that it's just the Ten-Tails taking a different

form<sup>[43]</sup>, but really that voice is Kaguya's - urging the possession to facilitate the final step of her revival.

This final battle will see whether the separation of Sage power into Six Paths Senjutsu and the Rinnegan is truly preferable to its monolithic form. The first inheritance in Naruto yields him the Shakujo amongst other things as proof of his ascendance into a Bodhisattva via his unerring Bodhicitta - the presence of love and compassion for all beings<sup>[44]</sup>. Sasuke in turn gets the body-shifting ability in his Rinnegan, the Amenotejikara, which is based on the God Ame-no-Tajikarao who pulled Amaterasu out of the cave and ended the age of darkness<sup>[45]</sup>, so he has been symbolically represented surmounting imprisonment and ignorance.

While they're focusing on the fight outside, Sakura is within the Kamui realm trying to muster the strength to stab Obito in the eye, as he can no longer suppress Black Zetsu<sup>[46]</sup>; if Madara gets his Rinnegan this war is over. Despite her previous efforts to kill him she is reluctant to inflict pain, but Naruto would've done the same thing as he wants to find a middle-way out; Sasuke however would've done it without even asking since he was one of the first people to run over and try to kill him when the Tailed-Beasts were ripped out.

To retrieve it for himself, Madara rips Kakashi's eye out of its socket and uses it to enter the Kamui realm just in time. Whilst he regenerates he takes his time to break Obito physically and mentally, revealing that *he* was the one who orchestrated Rin's kidnapping not Kirigakure. Now he sees that Obito chose to release the sealing-tag placed on him in exactly the same way<sup>[47]</sup>, though he couldn't have imagined back then that Kakashi would be the one to kill her<sup>[48]</sup>.



The earlier snippet I mentioned about an asura needing to acquire Self-knowledge will also come with the stripping away of *Maya*(ignorance), and it is precisely this which an asura is capable of inflicting on others. In the Rigveda it refers to 'māyā' as the cunning of the Lords(asuras) Mitra and Varuna<sup>[49]</sup>, and these concepts are entangled because it involves the genius of leading people astray; people like Itachi could weave brilliant lies with a combination of genjutsu, acting, framing - anything, realising all too late that he could fool himself.

Madara had chosen him of all people because "you were genuinely devoted and kind to others. [...] Your deep love for Rin, for your comrades, for the Hokage and all other Shinobi, once you fell into darkness, it would conversely transform into an equally profound hatred for this world"<sup>[50]</sup>. Madara was able to negate every level in him that it took himself decades to sever, and Obito's transformation almost replaced his role completely, but now he has his left eye back, only he is *Madara*.

With everything now prepared, there is no need for further entertainment and he spins up a few obstacles whilst centring himself to launch the jutsu. "According to that stone tablet, when one who possesses the power of Rinne should draw near the moon the eye that can reflect off the moon and grant the infinite dream, shall open..."<sup>[51]</sup>. "Become One" is shouted as Kaguya's image hangs over the whole world<sup>[52]</sup>. What's more, the Moon is said to be the favoured symbol of the Great Mother and considered her fruit<sup>[53]</sup>, the expression of her essential spirit.

The Infinite Tsukuyomi is launched and shines over humanity - but I thought this is where the good guys win? Sasuke sees the tomoe of the Sharingan hit the moon and knows it's only a few moments before that light shall hit the world and it's game over. He races down to Naruto and the others and covers them in the Susanoo. Interestingly, it makes anyone

who gets touched by it possessed with Rinnegan<sup>[54]</sup>, but why? Well, if we recall from a long time ago during Naruto's confrontation with Nagato after he defeated all the Pains, Konan said that the Rinnegan are eyes "said to exist outside this world of life and death. Nagato's ocular power itself is a jutsu that presides over life and death"<sup>[55]</sup>. Rinne literally means Wheel cycle and represents the cycles of Samsara, and anyone who attains the Rinnegan can see outside of it, thus in severing the karmic cycle you see everyone being bestowed it; however, all those who embodied the Rinnegan into themselves were unaffected by the Infinite Tsukuyomi: Sasuke, Obito/Zetsu, Madara. Ordinary folk are given it as the ultimate irony that they are now outside of suffering but without any of the crystallised lessons from the journeying through those realms, which goes back to the ideas of Obito representing the path of easy-practice - in giving severance - and Sasuke as a result of self-severance. More pragmatically, you could also say those who were immune had a Rinnegan to counter Rinne-level genjutsu<sup>[56]</sup>, as Zetsu speculates: "His Rinnegan can deter even this jutsu?"<sup>[57]</sup> which is confirmed by Sasuke as it has ramped up his Susanoo's strength.

Now to make it eternal - Divine Deep Forest Emergence shall keep them all entombed and this will be the last light they ever see. The tree shall serve as a fitting coffin to live out this simulation. "All that's left is to get rid of you guys"<sup>[58]</sup> Zetsu growls, which Madara the saviour shall do. Naruto, Sasuke, Sakura, Kakashi - these are all the bad guys getting in the way of everyone's happiness, so what if it's a lie? Zetsu concurs, though this isn't the final chapter: "you are not a messiah, nor is this the end of things"<sup>[59]</sup>. The second time we have seen Madara get stabbed in the back, a betrayal which shows the veil stretches further back than him!

Mother's back.

Zetsu's paralyses Madara and the Divine Tree's roots spring forth and start to tie together with him, but this massive amount of inflooding chakra is too much for a single human body, and this is way stronger than even the Juubi. He's swallowed up entirely and from him emerges the archetypal symbol of the Tyrannical Mother: Kaguya Otsutsuki. She is essentially a God and the concentration of all three dojutsu within a stable form, the Byakugan and the Rinne-Sharingan as her third eye.

Her name was first seen in a single passage in the *Kojiki*, where she was a consort of Emperor Suinin. Her surname is taken from the record of her father, noted as King "Oho-tsutsuki-tari-ne"<sup>[60]</sup>, where the first bit translates to "Big Bamboo"(大[Big] 筒[Tube] 木[Wood]). Moreover, it seems that these two names were incorporated into *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*, where Kaguya-hime(Shining Princess) is found by a remote village family in a piece of wood<sup>[61]</sup>.

Initially no larger than the palm of their hand, she grew rapidly and word of her beauty spread across the land, attracting many suitors. They were persistent, and "These ardent lovers bore the ice and snow of winter and the thunderous heats of midsummer with equal fortitude"<sup>[62]</sup>. This may explain a couple of the worlds we see in a few moments time, with the incredibly icy land and the sweltering desert that Sasuke gets thrown into. Indeed, the first world of lava may be borrowed from the flames that she used to test the clothing of prospective suitors, to see if they were of proper quality and didn't burn, and obviously despising Naruto and Sasuke, she hoped to cast them into flames as well.

Reading the entire book, you see that the overarching narrative of her testing the hearts of all her suitors is really secondary to the *actual* knowledge only she knew: that she was from the Moon and would have to return eventually, and this was just deference until that time. It mirrors the

current actions of Zetsu as from the perspective of those suitors they take each challenge as it comes none the wiser to the actual reason at play.

Despite her nearing departure, Kaguya was intrigued at the lengths they would go and whether they could succeed in the tasks she set. But time after time she saw they would attempt to sidestep their difficulty; take the aforementioned fur robe for example which was supposed to be immune to fire, but burst brightly into flames<sup>[63]</sup>. It may be what caused the current reluctance with Kaguya towards humans here, concluding them to be disreputable. As the years go by, even her father tried to nudge her into getting married, to which she says she isn't so stupid to enter wedlock without putting them through their paces first<sup>[64]</sup>.

The emperor had ordered one of his maids to judge the beauty of Kaguya-hime and see whether she was sufficiently fair to be of his interest. She basically told her to scurry back to her palace and the emperor was left none the wiser. Thus he set off himself and decided this must be quite the catch to have disrespected him so bluntly. He enters the home and catches a glimpse of her radiance, but before he can take her back to the palace she vanishes<sup>[65]</sup>.

Years go by of her avoiding one man after another and her once sarcastic, witty and energetic nature mellows as she is often seen gazing at the moon in the dead of night. Her father asks what's the matter, but she's not thinking of anything in particular, everything just seems so depressing<sup>[66]</sup>. She began to weep openly, uncaring if people saw, and she finally told the truth that people from the moon had brought her here, and soon they would bring her back; she was upset at the grief this would cause her adoptive parents.

On word of this, the emperor had all his guards stationed outside the house and the door was locked, with her mother cuddling her tight so she couldn't be taken<sup>[67]</sup>. Nevertheless, the King of the Moon came down and pushed through all the defences with ease. But before the Princess leaves, she passes a letter to the Emperor relaying the entirety of her heart, articulating the reasons why she acted the way she did. As a parting gift she gives some of the elixir of immortality to him, and takes one final look at her weeping parents before adorning the robe of feathers, "and in a moment all memory of her earthly existence departed"<sup>[68]</sup>. That scarf is called *Tennyō no Hagoromo*, and is the derivation for the name of the Sage of Six Paths. In another translation it is said that one who wears this robe knows no griefs<sup>[69]</sup>, but here it's uncertain as to whether it was eating the chakra fruit that caused Kaguya to become totally emotionless, or after the birth of her children, but her caring nature for humans and her desire to live amongst them certainly waned.

## Secrets of the fruit

Now that we've looked at the deep role the Moon plays from a folkloric perspective, it's time to consider the alchemical tradition of East Asian countries, notably China, with the story of Chang'e the Moon Goddess. There are many different accounts for how she came to acquire the elixir of immortality, but you can find one succinct retelling in the *Huainanzi*. Her Husband Yi had gone to the Queen Mother of the West to ask for the Elixir<sup>[70]</sup>, presumably because of his success in shooting down Nine of the Ten Suns that threatened to scorch the Earth. His request was fulfilled and the Queen bequeathed it to him, but Chang'e stole it and fled to the Moon. Some versions will say it's because Yi was turning into a tyrant, and others express that Chang'e expressly desired it.

This links back to the original tale of Kaguya-hime in a way as there's a moment where she asks her suitors to get "the treasure hard to attain"<sup>[71]</sup>, which is precisely a test of their heroic capabilities, but this is also the central goal of alchemy - to acquire the treasure(the stone) and produce it in visible form<sup>[72]</sup>. In our case that would be the Divine Fruit, and yet another layer of confluence arises through Neumann's work on the Mother archetype, as he notes the symbol of immortality is tied together with 'the fruit birth'<sup>[73]</sup>; it is the Mother sustaining herself through the production of her own fruit.

This personality of Kaguya's we see resonates with the more greedy and malign interpretations of Chang'e, but the Moon Goddess herself is often not the one depicted as producing the elixir, which is where our second character comes into play - the Moon Rabbit. The idea stems from interpreting markings on the near side of the moon as a rabbit/hare, using a mortar and pestle to ground up ingredients. In Chinese alchemy these may include Jade, Cinnabar and Hematite<sup>[74]</sup>, and we get an inkling that this idea has trickled into *Boruto*, as the Otsutsuki can turn nearby targets into edible chakra fruit/pills with the Cinnabar Elixir technique.

Kaguya has been described as a rabbit goddess<sup>[75]</sup> as thus the fusion of these two myths as she is the one who shall make, prepare and eat the fruit herself in the spirit of Ostanos: "Nature rejoices in nature. Nature subdues nature. Nature rules over nature". All the Otsutsuki in fact are alchemical practitioners, being bequeathed those horns in reference to the long ears of the Moon-rabbit.

Aside from being an assistant to Chang'e, the Daoist Goddess Xiwangmu<sup>[76]</sup>, the Queen Mother of the West also employs the Rabbit as a servant to look after her sacred orchard where peaches grow and promise longevity, ripening once every three thousand years<sup>[77]</sup>. This myth was

likely adapted into the tale *Journey to the West*, where Heaven tried to get Sun Wukong to look after their heavenly peach trees, some of which taking three thousand years to ripen<sup>[78]</sup>, and if consumed would make the person immortal.

There's not much crossover with the fruit in the biblical corpus aside from being forbidden to consume by normal folk, as it grants the person knowledge of good and evil not extended youth and physical power. Indeed, the fruits described in the *Journey to the West* offer a closer resemblance since there is a group of heavenly beings which regularly partake of them, but in this case the Otsutsuki *lack* the knowledge of good and evil.

They primarily concern themselves with procuring and developing the Tree for the sake of reaping the material benefits, specifically the genetic information that comes from the Chakra Fruit holding everything of the planet it absorbed<sup>[79]</sup>; but remember, a true Alchemist's focus was not the transmutation of metals into gold, rather the attainment of spiritual powers and the purification of the soul<sup>[80]</sup>; we see however that this has been watered down into a physical immortality that facilitates the consumption of yet more fruit, more power, which gets hailed a "unique and peerless existence"<sup>[81]</sup> - a "God".

Their obsession with Nature seems to be a perversion from their Shugendo roots, as the Mountain religion has a central principle of demarcating between "sacred nature" - the Mountains - and "secular nature" - the Plains<sup>[82]</sup>. Kaguya had said the Earth was her precious nursery<sup>[83]</sup> to do what she pleased, but if this next source is anything to go by, it would involve the religious participation *between* the Shugenja and the sacred environment such that one became an eternal existence dwelling in the Divine<sup>[84]</sup>.

All of this ascension and wanting to live forever marks the worst kind of Humanism, for it completely presupposes one's ability to reach salvation themselves. Historically this passing of wisdom has supposed practically the opposite, as we are told man can only receive the secret knowledge through divine inspiration, or from the lips of a divinely inspired master<sup>[85]</sup>. As independent as Naruto and Sasuke both are, the two of them have been bestowed strength by "God"(Hagoromo) in return for their striving. Going back to Sasuke's symbolism, he cannot have been made truly free it seems without divine assistance, so does this invalidate our philosophy of the individual? No, let me illustrate why.

Whenever Naruto has entered the frame of mind that he's been unstoppable, can save everyone, including himself, the way he perceives the world changes dramatically. Everybody is now shaped as a thing which just needs to be calibrated, or their evil expunged and they're good to go. He has to realise that he isn't a machine which converts people, there are no "salvation mechanics", he is only the principle that must stand before them and keep his hand outstretched. He is the Stone itself, and its completion requires the grace of God *to keep his mode of helping others as personal too*, as a God which one can speak to is not an attempt to make Him comprehensible inasmuch as it is to maintain a dialogical relationship to *all people* as well.

In Jung's *Alchemical Studies*, it notes the Stone as being identical to the Tree in the aptly named subsection *The tree as the lapis*; it's no coincidence that the stone which sleeps as ore in the depths of people would be the primary Root amongst all, and thus the thing the Spirit Tree itself relies on: *Plant this tree on the stone, that it fear not the buffetings of the winds*<sup>[86]</sup>. To be clear, this quote pertains to the tree of Wisdom, but this is made by the same journeying through the apocalypse that our Spirit Tree is, and thus they serve as interchangeable terms.



One will never make such a stone, or such a tree, without sacrificing oneself and the way the Otsutsuki sacrifice others and delegate the production of the elixir, turn their own brethren into consumables approaches an Ouroboric nature but never attains it; they stay in the material, the Apophic and the unconscious. Conversely, look at the efforts of people to lay their lives on the line to help Naruto, look at Guy, Neji and many others. Any sacrifice made by the root, the stems, the leaves cascade across every part of the Spirit Tree, whereas theirs crumples down for the sake of one deluded person's benefit.

## The End of History

The tale of Shinobi is nothing more than the work of restoring Mother. This is the gist from Zetsu's dialogue which encapsulates the largest retelling of history we've seen yet, predating even Hagoromo's awareness, with the story of Kaguya and her two children. This is a pivotal moment as the root cause of the hatred in Shinobi culture has been identified, and for the first time we see both Naruto *and* Sasuke's ways of Being as requisite for defeating this enemy.

On the one hand, we have Naruto who has listened to the stories of individuals all his life, with the histories of Haku, Neji, Sasuke, Gaara, Nagato, and learnt about what a village, nation and governmental model should offer a person based on all their perspectives; likewise, Sasuke has asked "What is a clan? What is a village? What is a Shinobi?"<sup>[87]</sup> and heard about the founding of the Leaf from the prior Kage; moreover, he comprehends the village from a top-down perspective with these institutions and organisations in mind. The fulfilment of this dynamic is at play when Naruto played tug of war against Obito; it was partly his work to inspire everyone *up* to the Allied Nations to join him, but then they jumped

down to lend a hand<sup>[88]</sup>, which cemented true collaboration and secured his victory. It isn't that having Sasuke on side is a nice added bonus, but he's the man who will make Naruto's way of governing possible, evidenced by his role as Shadow-Hokage in *Boruto*.

Speaking of which, their collaboration in this next sequence is unconventional but quite ingenious, as Naruto's use of the harem jutsu is something Kaguya would never expect. She's watching out for some complicated technique that would ensnare or paralyse, but this is such a curveball that it creates a window for a sucker punch<sup>[89]</sup>. His pervy ninjutsu might just save the world.

They almost manage to complete the seal but she shifts to the ice world, and she's a bit smarter this time and chucks Sasuke into a separate realm. This jutsu where she can teleport just herself and/or a few others by opening up a wormhole is called *Yomotsu Hirasaka*, which is named after the passageway to the underworld(Yomi) that was blocked off by Izanagi<sup>[90]</sup>. But the much more chakra-intensive jutsu is the *Amenominaka*, where the dimension comes to her, and the entire world itself is shifted<sub>3</sub><sup>[91][92]</sup>.

Seeing that it's a spacetime Ninjutsu, Obito reckons he may be able to slip into them using Kamui. The only problem is that it will require an enormous amount of chakra to accomplish the journey to rescue Sasuke<sup>[93]</sup>. Sakura offers up her strength and embodies the role of Isis once again, beginning the emblematic search for Osiris in the desert.

They check different timespaces, but one portal they open is a sea of acid that roars in and burns through her jacket<sup>[94]</sup>. But instead of using too much

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<sup>2</sup> Named after the first Shinto God that came into existence and is said to be the heart of the universe, Ame-nominakanushi. The centre of the universe ties in with the fact that Kaguya is the centre point to which all other worlds shall revolve around.

time to heal herself, she keeps going and continually supplies chakra to Obito for the next search. He sees that she is willing to “help him when he starts tripping”<sup>[95]</sup>, which is what Kakashi said to him in regards to helping Naruto.

Now that both of them are reunited, the threat of sealing reemerges so there's no option for Kaguya to conserve chakra. She teleports them all again, this time to a high-gravity plane where movement is heavily restricted. The bone-killing ash is a one-shot technique and Obito and Kakashi are rushing to use themselves as meat-shields to protect those two, but Obito doesn't want his friend to join him just yet, and uses Kamui for the last time to teleport the spear away<sup>[96]</sup>. He thanks Naruto for trying to heal him again, but really he wants to thank him for something else: “It was as if... when I looked at you, I saw my past self. And regretted the current me. However, more than that, it also made me happy... When I was a kid, I'd imagine myself as Hokage so often... I think you brought back that indescribable feeling of exhilaration and uncertainty. Imagining the village, comrades and me as Hokage, even after all that's happened. Just the thought of it seems to fill up the hole in my heart”<sup>[97]</sup>. That he mentions exhilaration and uncertainty is testament to feeling the call to adventure: you feel alive and ready to tackle the unknown because you have set forth along the road that means something. He remembers that moment with Rin where she encourages him to become Hokage and how she'll be there to see him save the world<sup>[98]</sup>. It is now that Obito has come full circle and accepted the difficult task of responsibility.

With little life remaining, he has tried his best to atone for the multitude of sins he has committed. It began right after he was defeated, as he could see the truth in Naruto's words, deciding to perform the same sacrifice that Nagato did. From there he progresses and manages to save Naruto's life by reconnecting him with Kurama, when he was ironically the person which

spurred Minato to implant him into his son in the first place. Earlier he had said the feeling of having a Jinchuriki must be a way of understanding his despair<sup>[99]</sup>, but the pain of separating from Kurama goes beyond just the technicalities of Bijū withdrawal.

We're flying back through his life as he tries to make good on the things he had formerly annihilated, like the remnants of his clan, and in saving the last light of the Uchiha in Sasuke, he keeps walking forward.

This is what happens when you dare to accept Naruto's hand, but all the while he has that weight, he finally sees that Rin is always watching, Kakashi is there to catch him when he stumbles, and the example he wanted to set in Naruto will continue on after he dies. He is now right back at the day he turned into Madara, unable to accept Rin's death, but here once more he can perform the very sacrifice he previously rejected. Standing in front of his comrades, his dream of Hokage affirms itself.

Going back to one of the earliest moments that Naruto had ever complimented anyone with Inari, he called him a "big strong boy", and now Obito is the coolest guy. Neither is the full truth to be sure, but in the same spiritual pipeline which comes from filling one's heart, is the spirit which allows oneself to head forth into uncertainty.

## 25

### The final, final, final battle. I swear!

Now then, how the hell do we get back? The world is saved, but this planet doesn't seem to have a back door. Luckily that's all being taken care of at home, for Hagoromo has called upon prior Kage to aid in the summoning of all Nine Bijū plus the four of them - and Madara<sup>[1]</sup>. The evil that plagued and steered the Shinobi world towards violence is no longer present and the shackles are off to welcome in a new era of Shinobi. Hagoromo brings them back and congratulates them on saving the world: "Welcome to the end of your predecessors"<sup>[2]</sup>.

Hashirama walks over to his rival, friend and brother for one last time. He has been stripped of everything: his eyes, his Bijū, his loyal pawns. Nothing remains but to look around and see that Hashirama's dream persists, and his was squashed. He thinks perhaps it is the correct way to bestow things to the next generation, using our own time to do everything we can to make their future task a little easier<sup>[3]</sup>. Hashirama offers to have a drink as war buddies when they go into the afterlife, and this is the completion of something Madara had said to him when they were stone skipping<sup>[4]</sup>. Madara thinks that sounds pretty fine by him<sup>[5]</sup>.

Naruto says goodbye to his father, and he wants his mum to know she doesn't have to worry - he's doing just fine. Thus completes the resurrection and resolve of the Old King, with the issues of his time now over and the world ready to embark on a new era of rule. You cannot leave problems in the belly of the whale, for they have to be brought forth, to which it was Naruto and Sasuke's efforts that culminated in this victory.

Von Neumann records an apt quote from Ernst Barlach, in regards to the Hero being the one who has to awaken the sleeping images of the future<sup>[6]</sup>, but this makes him the bringer of the New Law, inadvertently painting him as the enemy of the old ruling system, culture and existing court of conscience<sup>[6]</sup>. Both Naruto and Sasuke mark this period of transition, which as we've noted primarily occurs through love or power, with each choosing to specialise, but the latter still cannot commit to a project which integrates what came prior. Sasuke's words about retribution and the assassination of the Kage inside the Infinite Tsukuyomi snaps everyone out of their utopian dream and they realise there is still malice lurking. Hagoromo can see the ways of Indra are still present, as he asked him what it is he wanted to do when the war is over, as he was unsure whether this success with his fellow reincarnate had broken the curse that lies between them. But Naruto says this time isn't gonna go the way of Indra and Ashura, for "I ain't Ashura and Sasuke ain't Indra either"<sup>[7]</sup>.

Many had written off this development of Sasuke's as just another hair-brained scheme due to awakening a little more power and a touch more insight; however, he has been plotting about what a village is and how this all fits into a puzzle for some time, with his quest for truth being earlier than his talk with the Four Hokage. In every case, this "suddenness" was really just a moment that tipped their past guilt, pain and anger over the edge into a new order. When Danzo couldn't lift his hand and accept being a decoy, that was when he devoted himself to eradicating emotions, but this was based on the feeling he *had* to sacrifice himself in the spirit of the Shinobi. For Obito, he grew up without parents, without much natural talent or many friends and losing Rin was the final curtain on a world without hope. If only Sasuke could see these life stories he may have had a more complete picture of what to do.

## The final valley

If history is about to resolve itself, then it's fitting that the last "Izanami" left to undo is the battle they had at the final valley four years ago. Last time they had seen the hate and the darkness in one another, but could they really read each other's mind? Through countless tribulations, the recognition of the other has grown, as both lived out the life of the other.

Naruto says some wise words from Itachi, that only the one who is acknowledged by all can become Hokage. This idea of revolution isn't the work befitting a leader, and one aspect of this match is ironing out what it means to assume that position<sup>[8]</sup>. Sasuke sees that people will make sacrifices *for* the village, with his brother being the archetypal maxim of that idea, and he sacrificed his entire clan for this ethereal something.

He looks at Itachi's life and his sacrifices show that the village is a centralised monolith which subjects must dedicate themselves to, but he doesn't want them to resolve their own problems like his late brother did. This can cause pain and anguish should it go wrong - especially since he is the one who's circumnavigated Samsara: "I myself will deal with everything personally. I will handle all of the Shinobi problems. I shall also dispense all judgement and punishment. I'll concentrate all hatred upon myself and bring together every single village under my control"<sup>[9]</sup>. He shall remain hated, for he doesn't see another way, and that is what he shall take from Itachi's example<sup>[10]</sup>, despite his final words being that he wished he would've just told Sasuke everything from the start<sup>[11]</sup>.

The reason Sasuke believes this leads to accurate moral reflection and a right to govern is because it looks to be the only tool available for applying negation and scrutiny towards his own actions, which goes back to the "negative awakening of the ego" in Chapter 19. He implies that he can focus hatred from all aspects of people's lives onto him, which would have to be of such intensity to have unanimity amongst everyone, that it matches the

likes of Pain, Madara, Kaguya and so on<sup>[12]</sup>. Indra has come to understand the necessity of having an obstacle, a joint enemy and in never leaving this post it should mean their teamwork will never dissipate. However, he would never allow *himself* to be surmounted for he is Hatred, and admits to Naruto he would have to dabble in immortality<sup>[13]</sup>. He doesn't play the role of obstacle completely, he just becomes the tyrannical King.

Sasuke is inheriting shades of the very man he despised in Danzo, acclimating to a life of total surveillance, lies, mass sacrifice and international manipulation which cost him the brother he wishes to exemplify; in typical Danzo fashion he doesn't care if nobody else agrees, and he has no interest in imbuing the Village Identity into his people.

He also claims that their recent collaboration versus Kaguya "doesn't always go well"<sup>[14]</sup>, just like the founders of the Leaf village - but he cannot see the lessons that have developed from history, precisely because he's had enough with the past. If someone were to grow strong and challenge his throne but were killed in the process, then hatred would arise from their death. Then people would take out their pain on others, and Sasuke is no longer the centre of attention. Is he going to *increase* the suffering amongst his populace to retain their "teamwork"? The village would disintegrate. Even if subjects were to avoid making a fuss, this is no guarantee of survival since people like Madara would either render people in his likeness, as he did with Obito for the sake of his goal, or he would throw people into the Infinite Tsukuyomi, so evil will have a plan for you regardless of what choice you make. Eventually you will become a problem out of just Being.

Power has far-reaching tendrils, and this is exactly how Naruto thought when he first joined the battlefield<sup>[15]</sup>, but he had his arrogance reigned in with this simple advice: you can't do it all yourself, you have to let others fight their own battles, and you cannot force an individual into being saved;



what's more, Sasuke has assumed the form of Madara that Itachi had warned Naruto about if he stayed on that path. The two of them take each side of Itachi, and this is the second source of contention; whenever Sasuke heard his words he thought they were lies, and whenever Naruto saw his actions he came to know that it wasn't his motivation to kill them, he just couldn't find another way. Both of them have disregarded one aspect, but Itachi is both a criminal and a hero, but being ardent in separating those two is where we get problems on deciding what he is.

It is a battle of one wishing to throw away the past, and the other who sees it as tantamount that it carries on: "I learned everything I know from the people of the past! Especially about how to figure out what to do after making a mistake!"<sup>[16]</sup>. When he spoke with the sage, Sasuke said Naruto was the last one he had to cut down, because to him, he remains his closest friend<sup>[17]</sup>. The last bond remaining to achieving his goal. Both of them were able to say that because they were friends it merited their ambition, which is the last crossover left to flesh out.

## Fight's on!

Last time it was Naruto who hopped over to Madara's statue, but here we see in the manga he got smacked off of Hashirama's<sup>[18]</sup>, whereas in the anime their first exchange was when they ran and met in the middle, which was to signify their status as equals.

They gear up to their symbolic maximums very quickly as Sasuke already has his fully transformed Susanoo fighting the Tailed-Beast transformation; once again, acknowledgment of the other arises early and it's what precedes the most violent parts of the fight. They scale their strikes with the Susanoo's Chidori and Kurama's Bijū bomb, the fingerprints of their humanity present in this godly battle<sup>[19]</sup>. In the first match, this exchange

caused Naruto to reflect separately on the other, whereas now they jointly enter the Talk No Jutsu space.

Sasuke's journey has seen him wriggle out of the clutches of Orochimaru and have the soundness of mind to use him in the resurrection of the Kage. He climbed out of Itachi's and Obito's grip and the solace of the caves they tried to seat him in and now he stands as an individual. He shall take his final step into the shadows by using his own Susano'o as the vessel to ingest all the chakra from the nine Tailed Beasts.

To counter this, Naruto does his usual shadow-clone jutsu but applied to his Kurama transformation, and Sasuke comments that this is really just a coverup for his loneliness<sup>[20]</sup>. He's trying to make the case that he's all talk and his words and philosophy don't add up, which was certainly true for a time. Nobody would cheer for him, train with him and he could use them in tandem with the transformation techniques he learned for different forms of entertainment, but this ultimately covered up the fact he was lonely; what his clones have come to represent now though is the support for others he never had, going beyond Hashirama's thousand-hands Buddha, for the clone is a *person* they can talk to and Naruto will no doubt remember all their conversations.

This jutsu has been there since the beginning and relied on the power of hatred to get their numbers into double or triple digits, but he stands now as the *antithesis* of the incarnate of hatred - as the golden fox. On the outside the shift in combat styles is minimal, but his mentality has developed astronomically and due to Sasuke's eye for actions above words he doesn't notice this.

The final echelon of this struggle is reached, and Naruto pours the nature energy he has accrued up to the base, with all the clones recombining into a

single multi-handed, multi-headed form<sup>[21]</sup> which represents the Asura to Sasuke's Indra<sup>[22]</sup>. A thunderbolt is fitting for the highest level of combat between any of the reincarnations, and this is the exchange which blows them both to bits and sends them crashing to the ground, the heads of the statues of Madara and Hashirama obliterated.

They have expended their most powerful jutsu, and now they're drained they revert back to being human. I guess now is the time to mention that this is the middle section of Sai's picture book, for it was the finality of everything they had learned, all prior skills and abilities condensed in that moment, and now the story goes backwards, as we're seeing Amaterasu and the control of the Nine-Tails cloak, things in mid to late Shippuden, then the Rasengan and the Chidori, until they go right back to punching each other in the face - like it was in their first ever fight when they were five years old. Sasuke had learned a new trick or got a new set of eyes each time whilst Naruto tried to hold hands with people on the other side - with a couple notable exceptions. For Sai it was realising that he couldn't apply a lack of emotion like he had done the entire book to the final section, and the eureka moment was realising the tricks he had used for getting through Hell had to cease when it came to his brother. I think the ending here is a little more graphic than the peaceful scene Sai had imagined, but nevertheless they both have smiles on their faces.

Every single one of their traditional Rasengan-Chidori exchanges till now were "horizontal", by which I mean they were struck at equal level, but this last one is vertical which may serve as a fitting way to tie this up as their very first clash was on top of the hospital<sup>[23]</sup> - the only other time Sasuke was above and Naruto below, and that has been repeated presumably to show completion. The same black sphere swells and dissolves into white light, and the statues of Madara and Hashirama dissolve in the blast<sup>[24]</sup> signifying the end of history. Sasuke comes to and takes a brief look down,

seeing that it's truly over. Neither of them can move or they'll bleed out and die, so all that's left is to ask why the hell would he go this far.

Naruto says the same answer, saying it since they were kids, but what exactly does that word mean to him? To put it succinctly... "when I see you take on stuff and get all messed up... it kinda ... hurts"<sup>[25]</sup>. The bond is real, tangible but hard to formalise, and yet Sasuke knows exactly what he means. It has a weird quality, which like Itachi's, allows him to remember parts of his childhood that were tucked away somewhere deep: "the more I watched you being idiotic and getting yelled at over and over ... It started weighing on my mind. That's when I wondered... if your weakness was rubbing off on me. Afterwards, every time I'd see you, I'd think more and more about you. Seeing you desperately trying to bond with others made me recall my family... [...] I began to see a shadow of my own family in team 7... that's why every time I saw you suffering... Yeah, that's right ... I too felt pain. When I understood your hurt, I finally saw you as a comrade"<sup>[26]</sup>.

Later, he also says that he understands what Naruto meant when he imagined this was what it was like to have a brother, but surely he knows since he had one; in this moment of accepting Naruto, he clarified his bond with Itachi because he reconciled both sides of him and he finally gets what having a brother feels like<sup>[27]</sup>, as when Naruto said "it hurts seeing you get all messed up", it was the same instinctive pain he felt for his biological brother despite everything that had happened between them, and he cried for him once he knew the truth. In the corresponding anime episode, Sasuke is looking at Naruto's memories, including his interactions with Itachi. There he resonates with his words, and it's him that he sees before realising the mistakes he's made.

They awaken and Naruto finds that he still can't move, but as soon as he can it's back to fighting! Sasuke chuckles, as he obviously hasn't seen the

massive psychological shift that's taken place. He admits to his friend that he's lost, but Naruto snaps at him saying this wasn't about winning or losing, it was about getting him to stop sulking and jabbering on about hatred<sup>[28]</sup>. To allow his friend to finally accept their bond, and no matter what he will never cut him off, but that's not what Sasuke meant when he said he lost - for he surrendered in the battle of ideals as well.

But how can he be sure that he won't waver or attack the village again? Naruto just looks at him as even he's tired of repeating the same thing, though he's always thought Sasuke was a little bit dim.

This is the first time in Sasuke's life that he could just *Be*, with the veil of Maya totally lifted. Since he was a child he always had to be someone: whether it was looking up to and adopting the image of his older brother, then the Avenger, then Orochimaru's vessel, an Uchiha fanaticist and now Indra's reincarnation - when was he *ever* Sasuke Uchiha? He can finally see every side of himself, but in that clarity is a moment of guilt.

He doesn't mind if he dies here, just transplant the Rinnegan to Kakashi or whoever and the Infinite Tsukuyomi can be stopped, and he will put an end to himself<sup>[29]</sup>. No chance! His goal is to get all Shinobi to cooperate with each other, including him of course, but "Just because you want that doesn't mean others will agree to it"<sup>[29]</sup>. Right in the spirit of who he was after leaving the Final Valley the first time, breaking away from his brother's words<sup>[30]</sup>, but Naruto knows that Shinobi can stop fighting amongst themselves not just when there is an antagonist in front of them, but when there is love between them.

We finally see the results of their injuries and they've both lost an arm, marking the end of cycles<sup>[31]</sup>. The same arm that has launched Chidori and Rasengan countless times since the final valley plays against what Kakashi

says after picking Naruto up at the end of the first series: “when I watch the river flow by, it’s like it’s showing me that the battle like it, will never cease. Like the two men who built Konoha village, whose statues loom over us, Naruto and Sasuke as long as they live the cycle will continue”<sup>[32]</sup>.

They get patched up, and Sasuke is about to head off on his travels. Naruto takes out his old headband, and he can finally come to see what Naruto was on about: “Now we’re able to claim each other’s pain. And after seeing the world via my travels I believe this concept can be applied to even bigger things than just us. But it’s not something that can be done as easily as you were able to. I never assumed it would be simple, just like it wasn’t with the two of us”<sup>[33]</sup>.

“It’s kind of like a prayer, to keep enduring until it comes to be, no matter what. And to those whom that task falls on, perhaps that is what it means ... to be a ninja”<sup>[34]</sup>. To endure, with faith in oneself for the sake of the journey of the individual, and to traverse your way whilst entwining with and supporting others; the symbol of Sasuke’s headband is the primary call to adventure. In the end, when you take any principle, you can always say there is a path that is an exception to that rule, and thus the only principle you could ever ascribe to all is to *live*. That is the Way itself, and faith is the prayer that the principle of your life will come from that striving.

I would like to end this side-by-side with *Naruto* with a special quote from Alan Watts, someone who popularised and taught westerners Eastern ways of thinking for decades: “Let’s suppose that you were able every night to dream any dream you wanted to dream. And you would naturally as you began on this adventure of dreams you would fulfil all your wishes. You would have every kind of pleasure you could conceive... and after several nights you would say “Well, that was pretty great.” But now let’s have a surprise. Let’s have a dream which isn’t under control. Where something’s

gonna happen to me and I don't know what it's gonna be. Then you would get more and more adventurous, and you would make further and further arc gambles as to what you would dream. And finally, you would dream... where you are now".

## Appendix 1: 'Naruto is the worst character in Naruto'

This is an additional section which will serve as a response to the video with the above title<sup>[1]</sup>. It falls under the guise of the general 'Naruto is a fraud/hypocrite/bad representative of the values he espouses' theme, though there is nothing in particular about this video other than it being the most recent articulation of this train of thought that spurs a response.

The analysis starts by saying that this is the classic case of a child which starts with nothing and goes from zero-to-hero by the end<sup>[2]</sup>. This is partially true. Naruto starts with nothing in regards to having no parents, friends and so forth - but he already has a demon that is sealed within him, and in fact he feels the *weight* of all those aforementioned absences. It isn't just a journey of additions and improvements, as it is about accepting what oneself is - and this message starts from accepting oneself as *primarily* human and not a tool, as per the *Land of Waves*, and continuously scales to the end of Shippuden as embracing the multi-textured nature of one's humanity.

The video splits *Naruto's* themes into two main categories:

Fate	Forgiveness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Fate of your power</li><li>- Fate of your social standing</li></ul>	

This already implies that Naruto didn't start with nothing, as he is described to have both incredible power, and high social standing due to the nature of his birth to the Fourth Hokage. This paradox is remediated however when he says that Naruto is only a good example in the first series and "loses his way" when it comes to Shippuden<sup>[3]</sup>. The reason Naruto gets



demoted is because he can no longer be said to have acquired his power through hard work, but this fails to contextualise *why* he works hard. Yes, in the first arc he wanted to become a good Hokage and have everyone look up to and respect him, but carrying that idea beyond the Land of Waves would be an oversimplification. That arc closes with his desire to work hard to become an individual and to follow his own Path, which scales to the idea of challenging typical Confucian ideas over societal harmony, which is what the Neji fight is actually about<sup>[4]</sup>. It's not a battle of hard work versus genius as he says<sup>[5]</sup>, but how a sprinkle of Taoism goes a long Way.

Hard work isn't even the sole benefactor for Lee either, since he is lauded as a genius by Kakashi for opening the Eight Gates by sheer Will, and Guy can see he is a genius of hard work. The difference is that Lee shows a type of genius which one can *develop*. What's more, the concept of hard work is always subset to an ideal or philosophy that a character holds, and every character is meant to be an embodiment of an ideal that goes into battle with another to resolve their disagreements.

In the *Naruto vs Neji* match, Neji fights as the personification of the philosophy of determinism, and repeatedly calls the proctor to stop the match since things are "preordained" to be in his favour, but the arguments he makes *do not align with his humanity*. He cannot see into the future despite his attempt to do so against Hinata, and he doesn't abide by the destiny of a branch family member as he learns their own jutsu, despite never being born into their caste. That is *his* hard work, which as a concept as such benefits everybody's philosophy, but the plight of *Naruto*(the manga) is about finding an answer which resonates with every kind of individual, and thus comes the incorporation of religion, mythology, folklore - everything, in order to find it. Since hard work is one part of the universal solution, and that is illustrated very simply in Lee, people have conflated

him to be the preeminent symbol that watchers should align themselves with.

Looking at his fight with Gaara, we have to scale up from this idea of power to the need that every character has to affirm their own nindo. Many remember vividly the extent to which Gaara broke Lee's arms and legs amongst the torrential downpourings of sand, but what was the one thing Gaara wasn't able to break? His resolve to fight for and maintain his own Ninja Way. Likewise, Lee shatters Gaara's personality despite not issuing serious damage, so when it comes to the development of the *self*, Lee can be proud of this result.

In the *Danzo does it* section, I highlight how one can forever remain locked in seeing Naruto's efforts and ways of sagely rule through the lens of power<sup>[6]</sup>, which is reiterated explicitly with Hagoromo's ninja creed and Indra's efforts to use chakra's power for the development of ninjutsu away from the spiritual practices. But this doesn't stop watchers and readers from being appalled by the introduction of reincarnates as, once again, it has been viewed through the lens of power, and not scaled to see the realisation that Naruto's teachings of forgiveness, perseverance and unity amongst all peoples is applicable even to the hatred that's manifested since the start of Shinobi. The creator says in regards to the power bequeathed by the Sage that it was 'from doing nothing'<sup>[7]</sup>, but then why is Sasuke's newfound Rinnegan ability called the Amenotejikara? Because his consistent symbolism as Amaterasu trapped in the cave of illusions, false pretences and lies is finally over because of his personal striving for truth. The reason Naruto was graced with the adornments of a Bodhisattva is because of his same commitment to truth-seeking, but from the bottom-up perspective of individuals, whereas Sasuke converses with the prior Kage and government officials for a top-down understanding.

I can completely understand why the last few segments of the war arc to the end of Shippuden have been misunderstood *ad infinitum* because the rapid developments aren't padded with explanations, nor are the power-scaling dynamics of the anime kept sane by the end; it seems Kishimoto wanted to make sure the key religious elements of Shintoism and Buddhism were incorporated, which really became noticeable when Itachi uncorked the Izanami on Kabuto for example. When push came to shove during the final chapters he cared more about the development of a cogent spiritual message than the thoroughness of the Ninja world he created; taking this into consideration, it is baffling that one critique after another highlights none of the religious and mythical significance not just as a means of character development but *narrative* development as well<sup>[8][9][10]</sup>.

The premises were laid out in the first series, as we track Naruto's increasing attachment to the nine tails and how it began to be his crutch when fighting, most noticeably against Sasuke at the final valley. This idea of attachment is what he shall be wrestling with in the early Shippuden chapters, as he believes it to be acceptable if it contributes to saving his comrades. But after injuring Sakura, and potentially killing villagers whilst possessed by Kurama against Pain, he can finally put his need to be attached to one side. With this came the advent of the principle of forgiveness, but all of the themes that were listed in the video only serve as the bedrock for Naruto's connection to others. It isn't the magic button that saves the world, but it's something Naruto has to do if he wants to help the other person, and when it came to the Waterfall of Truth it was the thing he had to offer himself to truly understand the pain of his embittered, dark personality. From there he could cross to the other side and continue his work against hatred.

While this is all well and good, "revealing that Naruto was the reincarnation of a literal God means he has no right to lecture anybody on

fate”<sup>[11]</sup>. That’s right, but he has every right to lecture people on their destiny and where they shall end up, because nobody can assume your pain and he’s never tried to push aside someone’s life experience, he just objects to the fact that this would have the final say on their life story. With the examples that are cited, Naruto never wanted Gaara to feel the consequences of ostracisation via his father and went above and beyond to help him, and he continued to risk his life for Tsunade which helped her overcome her fear of blood and so forth. Naruto accepts that people start life at different points of affluence and fortune, but that is only half of the puzzle for getting people to work together - and every instance of the divine has been in mutual collaboration<sup>[12][13]</sup>.

The last thing I’m going to address is the theme of ‘Fate via social standing’. The first series made a big deal of the Uchiha and the Hyuga clans and the status they enjoyed as being top dogs of the Leaf, and the power which coincides with their Kekkei Genki. Moreover, the social standing one has will have a proportionate effect on the power one has, and thus the themes of fate, power and status seem to marry with no problems at all. But as the series develops, we see that the nature of the villains that are introduced follow the same dynamics of *The Journey to the West*, whereby people with different upbringings, social status and power are termed villains, but when Sun Wukong can find a way to walk the path of redemption with them, no matter what their initial circumstances were, there is a path to peace, collaboration and individuation<sup>[14]</sup>.

In fact, the video states the enormity of genius like Itachi’s, but who was it that he looked up to the most? Naruto. When he interrogated him about his resolve to Sasuke before his death, he was able to answer a question of ultimatums that *he had failed* when being asked a similar thing by Danzo<sup>[15]</sup>. Again, who was it that the genius Neji Hyuga came to finally understand when he gave his life? Naruto. I’m not going to argue whether or not the

entire death was written for Hinata and Naruto's relationship, I'm just going to focus on the matter at hand. Neji said that he finally realised why his father felt it freeing that he would die, because it came with the ability to love others enough to sacrifice oneself for them, which surmounted the difficulty he had in accepting his own path. The pattern repeats for other generations as well, as Madara was the greatest genius in the series, and even he acquiesced to Hashirama's ideals for example<sup>[16]</sup>.

In conclusion, this debate will probably go on as long as this manga is still talked about, but I hope this segment and the chapters I've referenced go some way to reimagining these themes in a broader context beyond status, power, fate and so forth. A world where genuine prosperity is possible shall not be a dream, and I for one trust in this knucklehead.

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| 33. Ibid., Chapter 625<br>Volume 65,pg.147   | 34. <i>Japan Heritage Iga and Koka</i> , How the Ninja Cultivated Their Knowledge and Skills | 35. Cummins, <i>Iga and Koka Ninja Skills</i> , Part I : The skills of Iga and Koka, Concerning the Origin of Shinobi | 36. <i>What is a ninja?</i> , Magic and Fire, two skills of Iga-ryu Ninjutsu   Part I : The skills of Iga and Koka, THE PRINCIPLE OF FIRE HANDLERS |
| 37. <i>Japan Heritage Iga and Koka</i> , Subsection: The Management of the Ninja Organizations | 38. <i>Naruto</i> , Chapter 626 Volume 65,pg.154   | 39. Avalokiteshvara., Britannica  | 40. Buswell., Lopez., Entries A-Z, A, pg.82  |
| 41. <i>Naruto</i> , Chapter 626 Volume 65,pg.157   | 42. Reps., Senzaki., pg.166  | 43. Ibid., pg.186   | 44. Venkatesananda, Bala Kanda Boyhood of Rama., Ayodhya Kanda, pg.51  |
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## Chapter 23: Squad 7 Reunited

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85. Ibid., Chapter 655 Volume 68,pg.142	86. Ibid., Chapter 655 Volume 68,pg.147,148	87. Ibid., Chapter 655 Volume 68,pg.149,150	88. Ibid., Chapter 656 Volume 68,pg.155
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#### **Chapter 24: Endgame**

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5. Ibid., Chapter 665 Volume 69,pg.140,145	6. Ibid., Chapter 594 Volume 62,pg.125	7. Ibid., Chapter 564 Volume 59,pg.167	8. Ibid., Chapter 467 Volume 50,pg.77,78
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**Chapter 25: The final, final, final battle. I swear!**

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29. Ibid., Chapter 698 Volume 72,pg.159	30. Ibid., Chapter 234 Volume 26,pg.161-163	31. Ibid., Chapter 698 Volume 72,pg.161	32. Ibid., Chapter 234 Volume 26,pg.159,160
33. Ibid., Chapter 699 Volume 72,pg.184	34. Ibid., Chapter 699 Volume 72,pg.185		

### **Appendix 1: 'Naruto is the worst character in Naruto'**

1. Naruto is the worst character in Naruto, <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-Jvb1Ln2sA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-Jvb1Ln2sA</a>	2. Ibid., ~2min40 - 3min	3. Ibid., ~3:50 - 4min 10	4. <i>Naruto vs Neji</i> , pg.64-66,72-73
5. Naruto is the worst character in Naruto, 16:30	6. <i>Danzo does it</i> , pg.215-223	7. Naruto is the worst character in Naruto, 28:27-28:31	8. Significance of Shinto mythology for Sasuke: <i>Battle between brothers</i> , pg.166-171
9. Significance of	10. Significance of the	11. <i>Naruto is the worst</i>	12. By knowing

Shinto and Buddhist mythology for laying the groundwork of Hashirama and Madara, <i>What is a village?</i> , pg.319,320	Shugendo in addition to the two central religions <i>Squad 7 Reunited</i> , pg.327,334	<i>character in Naruto:24:36</i>	thymself, he has come to clarify parts of his destiny in the manner of Socrates: <i>A turtle, an octopus and a waterfall</i> , pg.242,243
13. Madara leaves the confines of Indra's reincarnate which means it is not tethered to one's being: <i>Endgame</i> ,pg.349. Chapter 670,pg.33 notes the aligned circumstances and how Hagoromo can assist Naruto to find peace.	14. <i>Naruto vs Neji</i> , pg.69,72	15. The Taka, pg.241	16. <i>Naruto</i> , Chapter 691 Volume 72,pg.16,17

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