

Background and Plot

Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba is a shōnen anime produced by Ufotable Studio, based on the 2016 manga written by Koyoharu Gotouge. It follows the story of Tanjiro Kamado, a young woodsman whose family was brutally slaughtered by a demon, leaving only his sister Nezuko alive but transformed into a demon herself. Tanjiro becomes a demon slayer to avenge his family and find a cure for Nezuko's condition. The series explores themes of perseverance, compassion, and the struggle between good and evil, featuring stunning animation and character development.

Kami, Oni, and Yōkai

Kami have historically played a significant role in Japanese religious beliefs. Traditionally, kami were revered as entities embodying natural elements, spirits of ancestors, or deities associated with specific locations or activities. As society transitioned through different periods, the depiction and understanding of kami evolved. During the Tokugawa period (1603–1867 CE), people found new careers in cities. Under these circumstances, various kami, notably including the Inari fox spirits, emerged as people prayed for personal wishes. At the same time, scrolls were made describing and depicting evil entities known as yōkai. In Demon Slayer, characters like Muzan Kibutsuji and Rui mirror legendary yokai from Japanese folklore. Indeed, Muzan's authority over demons parallels the leadership of Nurarihyon, and Rui's web like abilities echo those of the Tsuchigumo, a race of spider-like yokai.

Warding Masks and Wisteria Flowers



Figure 1. Tanjiro Holding a Wisteria Flower While Wearing a Kitsune Mask

Wisteria play a key role in warding off demons. In Japan, it is said that a wisteria wrapping around a pine tree is associated with faithfulness or *kesshite hanarenai*. In this context, the wisteria's allure and permanence serves as a powerful metaphor for the resilience and steadfastness needed in combating demons. Kitsune Masks seamlessly complement the theme of warding off demons. In Japanese folklore, kitsune, or foxes, are often depicted as mystical creatures capable of shape-shifting and possessing supernatural powers. Thus, kitsune masks are worn during Shintō rituals and performances to offer protection against evil spirits and misfortune.

Breathing Techniques

Breathing techniques are essential to combat in Demon Slayer. These techniques allow wielders to enhance their physical abilities and unleash devastating attacks against demons. The concept of controlled breathing bears a striking resemblance to the practice of Zazen Meditation, particularly in its focus on the connection between the body, mind, and spirit. Dogen, a prominent Zen master and philosopher during the 13th century, viewed reality as a constantly shifting phenomenon, much like the fleeting beauty of natural surroundings. This perspective is better known as *mujo* and underscores ephemeral beauty of existence. By synchronizing their breathing with their movements, demon slayers are able to tap into their inner strength.

The Mugen Train Arc



Demon Slayer: Mugen Train, at the time of writing, is the highest grossing Japanese film of all time, toppling Hayao Miyazaki's 2001 classic *Spirited Away* by some 100 million dollars. Over the course of 2 hours, the film has several ups and downs ultimately ending with the death of Rengoku the Flame Hashira. The use of color is particularly striking. The greens of Ubuyashiki's garden. The yellows of the Infinity Train. The bright nichirin red of Hinokami Kagura or The Dance of the Fire God. The calming, still blues of the Tanjiro's soul. The film is truly a euphony of color.


The Spiritual Core




Figure 2. Sickly Passenger Basks in the Warmth of Tanjiro's Spiritual Core

Tanjiro's spiritual core in the Mugen Train Arc bears strong resemblance to Buddhist concepts of inner peace and compassion. Buddhism teaches the cultivation of inner peace and serenity through practices such as meditation and mindfulness. Tanjiro's sun-like core symbolizes his inner light and resilience, reflecting his ability to maintain a sense of calmness and tranquility even in the face of adversity. This inner peace allows him to navigate the challenges of demon slaying with clarity and resolve, embodying the Buddhist ideal of equanimity amidst the fluctuations of life. Looking past the self, Buddhism emphasizes *karuna* or the importance of understanding and alleviating the suffering of all sentient beings. Tanjiro's ocean-like expanse of warmth and peace reflects his profound compassion for others, as he strives to protect and save both humans and demons alike. His empathy towards demons, recognizing their humanity despite their monstrous nature, mirrors the Buddhist idea of universal compassion and the belief in the potential for enlightenment in all beings.

Conclusion and Addendum



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References

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