

CHAPTER  
**3**

Section 1

PRIMARY SOURCE *from the Bhagavad-Gita*

*The Bhagavad-Gita is an ancient text of Hinduism whose title means "The Song of God." Part of the epic poem the Mahabharata, the Bhagavad-Gita takes the form of a dialogue about the meaning of life between the warrior Arjuna and his charioteer Krishna, who is really the god Vishnu in disguise. This excerpt occurs before a battle between forces loyal to Arjuna's older brother and those loyal to his cousin. As you read, think about Arjuna's response to war.*

Arjuna saw them standing there:  
fathers, grandfathers, teachers,  
uncles, brothers, sons,  
grandsons, and friends.

He surveyed his elders  
and companions in both armies,  
all his kinsmen  
assembled together.

Dejected, filled with strange pity,  
he said this:

"Krishna, I see my kinsmen  
gathered here, wanting war.

My limbs sink,  
my mouth is parched,  
my body trembles,  
the hair bristles on my flesh. . . .

I see omens of chaos,  
Krishna; I see no good  
in killing my kinsmen  
in battle. . . .

They are teachers, fathers, sons,  
and grandfathers, uncles, grandsons,  
fathers and brothers of wives,  
and other men of our family.

I do not want to kill them  
even if I am killed, Krishna;  
not for kingship of all three worlds,  
much less for the earth! . . .

How can we ignore the wisdom  
of turning from this evil  
when we see the sin  
of family destruction, Krishna?

When the family is ruined,  
the timeless laws of family duty  
perish; and when duty is lost,  
chaos overwhelms the family. . . .

The sins of men who violate  
the family create disorder in society  
that undermines the constant laws  
of caste and family duty.

Krishna, we have heard  
that a place in hell  
is reserved for men  
who undermine family duties.

I lament the great sin  
we commit when our greed  
for kingship and pleasures  
drives us to kill our kinsmen.

If Dhritarashtra's armed sons  
kill me in battle when I am unarmed  
and offer no resistance,  
it will be my reward."

Saying this in the time of war,  
Arjuna slumped into the chariot  
and laid down his bow and arrows,  
his mind tormented by grief.

*from Barbara Stoler Miller, trans., The Bhagavad-Gita (New York: Bantam, 1986), 24–27.*

**Discussion Questions**

**Determining Main Ideas**

1. How does Arjuna feel just before the battle?
2. Why does Arjuna believe it is wrong to kill members of his family?
3. **Making Inferences** What values does this excerpt reflect?

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