

CHAPTER 3  
Section 1

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.

PRIMARY SOURCE from the Bhagavad-Gita

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Arjuna saw them standing there:

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?