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Bhagavad Gita Chapters 1-3 Summary

In the beginning of the Bhagavad Gita, there is a great battle that is about to begin between two armies. The leader of one of the armies, Arjuna asks Krishna to reveal who he was fighting against by sending a chariot in between both armies. When the chariot arrives, Arjuna realizes that he is battling against “teachers, fathers, sons, grandfathers, uncles, fathers-in-law, grandsons, brothers-in-law, and other kinsmen” (Mitchell 30). Arjuna realizes that he has no real desire to fight the people who oppose him. Arjuna is hesitant on the battlefield. He is conflicted because he respects the people who are in the opposing army. Arjuna tells Krishna that “It would be better to spend the rest of my life as a pauper, begging for food, than to kill these honored teachers” (Mitchell 32). Arjuna becomes discouraged knowing that he has to kill people he reveres. In his despair he tells Krishna that he is unable to fight. Krishna attempts to dissuade Arjuna’s decision not to fight by explaining that people can never truly die. Krishna compares physical death to the process of human growth. He says that “Before birth, beings are unmanifest; between birth and death, manifest; at death, unmanifest again” (Mitchell 35) In addition, Krishna condemns Arjuna for his cowardice. Krishna exclaims that, “And your enemies will sneer and mock you: “The mighty Arjuna, that brave man— he slunk from the field like a dog.” (Mitchell 36) Essentially, Krishna tells Arjuna that it is impossible to lose in this conflict. He says that if Arjuna loses he gains heaven and if he wins, he gains earth.

Arjuna is still hesitant to act in the beginning of chapter 3, however Krishna tells him the importance of being detached from the mentality of the material world. Krishna says that everyone must do some activity, but the intention is more important. Krishna states “The superior man is he whose mind can control his senses; with no attachment to results, he engages in the yoga of action.” (Mitchell 45). Krishna believes that actions should be done selflessly in order to liberate oneself from the law of Karma.