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Reflection on Bhagavad Gita

*Though they want to kill me, I have no desire to kill them, not even for the kingship of the three worlds, let alone for that of the earth. What joy would we have in killing Dhritarashtra's men? Evil will cling to us if we kill them, even though they are the aggressors. And it would be unworthy of us to kill our own kinsmen. How could we be happy if we did? Because their minds are overpowered by greed, they see no harm in destroying the family, no crime in treachery to friends. But we should know better, Krishna: clearly seeing the harm caused by the destruction of the family, we should turn back from this evil. When the family is destroyed, the ancient laws of family duty cease; when law ceases, lawlessness overwhelms the family; when lawlessness overwhelms the women of the family, they become corrupted; when women are corrupted, the intermixture of castes is the inevitable result. Intermixture of castes drags down to hell both those who destroy the family and the family itself; the spirits of the ancestors fall, deprived of their offerings of rice and water. Such are the evils caused by those who destroy the family: because of the intermixture of castes, caste duties are obliterated and the permanent duties of the family as well.*

-Mitchell, Stephen, "Bhagavad Gita", 2002, page 30

The Bhagavad Gita is an excerpt of the larger Indian epic known as the Mahabharata, in which the Prince Arjuna laments to his charioteer, actually the God Krishna in human form, over the slaying of his family on the opposing side of the war, stating that, despite them wanting to kill him, they are still family, and that kinslaying is still evil despite the context, to which Krishna responds that the true essence of individuals will not die even if their bodies perish, and then espouses other truths to Arjuna, such as, but not limited to, how he should be acting for the good of the world, and of his dharma, and not out of his own personal desires. This one book, merely an expanded but critical section of the larger Mahabharata, stands as an important part of the epic in which characterizes Arjuna and his struggles before he is shown the truth by Krishna.

This one excerpt taken from the Bhagavad Gita, while only a portion of his speech, acknowledges Arjuna's struggles in hardening his resolve to fight, and notes his biggest problem with this is the concept of kinslaying. Kinslaying, or the killing of one's family, was a major taboo in the ancient world, and judging from the text and Arjuna's speech on the matter, this was a significant taboo in ancient Indian culture. According to Arjuna, the act of kinslaying sows chaos within the family, and would rather die by their hand than fight and kill them. This excerpt of the speech is quite interesting in how it characterizes Arjuna, as while he is prepared to fight, he clearly does not wish to, especially since they are his family. This speech also highlights Arjuna's values, which show that, despite his circumstances, he values his family, and is kindhearted enough to care about them despite them standing on the other side of this war, but it also highlights his indecisiveness. Arjuna knows that they will be going to war, but is clearly hesitant on going through with it, even though the reality of war necessitates that people will

have to die to resolve it. This actually humanizes Arjuna to an extent, and showcases his inner conflict with his actions and despairs at what must be done.

This passage, and the text overall, also highlights a very human issue that Arjuna is experiencing: the need to do what needs to be done. While Arjuna is clearly in conflict over killing his family and friends, it takes Krishna and his wisdom in order to harden his resolve to commit to the upcoming battles. It's a universal feeling to feel conflicted over committing to certain actions, especially actions that are taboo in one's culture, but sometimes, such actions need to be done for the greater good, and it will often take outside intervention, such as Krishna's to help solidify one's resolve into acting on that intention