Searra Richardson

Shawn Smith

English 201

24 August 2018

The Relationships Between Mortals and Gods

In the Iliad and the Bhagavad Gita, gods are shown as higher entities that power over mortals. The Iliad especially illustrated the relationships between mortals and gods to its full extent and shows how their interactions affect their lives. They obtain their own personal attributes and powers that influence their actions and reactions to situations. Their interactions determine the fate of many and cause either peace or destruction.

Mortals and gods interact in a variety of ways. Mortals often pray to the gods for assistance or guidance to help them fight, live, etc. Mortals go to the gods whenever there is an issue they need to be solved and hope that they will answer the prayer before it is too late. Sometimes the gods answer and help and sometimes they don’t respond and leave it to fate to do what needs to be done. Mortals also give sacrifices and/or offerings to the gods to keep them happy and on their side. If a god is angry with you, it can wreak havoc on your life, so people pour drinks for the gods before themselves and other types of offerings to satisfy the gods. Overall, the gods are sort of like parents to the mortals in a way. They must be given respect and be obeyed no matter what the circumstances or there will be consequences. On page 84 of the Iliad Achilles stated, “I must- when the two of you hand down commands, Goddess, a man submits though his heart breaks with fury.” Achilles’ statement is a perfect illustration of the way mortals respect the gods and listen to them even if that is not what they desire to do. Achilles must obey the orders of Athena and Hera and not fight Agamemnon no matter how furious he is with him. This scene also shows how the gods offer guidance to mortals when they see fit. Athena and Hera know that Achilles will kill Agamemnon for taking Briseis, so Athena is sent to calm him down for the sake of the war. Mortals and gods also interact through disguises or by the mortals paying attention to how the gods are punishing or rewarding them. Mortals can see how the gods view them by whether they are being gifted and having their prayers answered or if they are weak and having destruction in their lives. This is a nonverbal way that the gods may interact with mortals opposed to the more direct ways.

Gods and mortals have separate powers and/or characteristics that are unique to each other. First, gods are wise and have powers such as disguise, healing, and manifesting plagues, storms or any other type of destruction. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna is showing Arjuna the ways of Yoga, Dharma, and Karma. This god is a great example of how wise gods are and how they use their wisdom to better mortals. On page 59, Krishna says, “In the world, there is no purifier like wisdom; in time, one who is oneself perfected in *yoga* finds that wisdom in the self.” Krishna is emphasizing the importance of wisdom to Arjuna so that Arjuna can further understand his teachings from Krishna who is extremely wise. Another power of the gods is the power to disguise themselves in whatever they want mortals to see them as. The mortal may know that the god is in disguise or may not know at all and think they are interacting with another mortal depending on what the god desires. They use these disguises to persuade or deceive mortals into doing what they want them to do. For example, in the Iliad Athena disguises herself as a Trojan soldier and convinces an archer to try to shoot Menelaus. Athena is attempting to give the Achaeans a reason to start the fighting again and keep the war going. The archer was unaware that the god was deceiving him, however, Athena was great at convincing him without it being a command from the gods. Powers or characteristics unique to mortals include cowardice at times, pettiness, prideful, and stubborn. The entire Trojan war began because of a woman named Helen was taken from her husband. Mortals fight over little issues as such frequently and let their pride overpower them. Mortals and gods also share some powers or characteristics. These may include strength in their own way, family-oriented, and having a rank of command. Both gods and mortals have instances where they are fighting for their families and love their families. Gods try to save their sons in battle and help them whenever possible and are hurt if they die. Mortals fight for them and hope that their sons grow up to be great warriors. In the Iliad, Hector is shown to have a deep love for his family. On page 211, it states, “So Hector prayed and placed his son in the arms of his loving wife. Andromache pressed the child to her scented breast, smiling through the tears.” He fights for his family and his wife and child are there waiting for him if and when he gets back. The rank of command for mortals and gods have the same overall layout. Mortals have kings and higher commanding officers, or warriors, and gods look up to Zeus and Hera and must obey them.

Mortals have control over situations until the gods see an issue or something that they do not agree with and then they try to change it. Basically, as long as mortals are mainly doing what the gods desire or don’t have a serious problem with, then the mortals have control of the situation. If not, the gods will interfere. They influence events such as wars that can completely change the outcome of the situation. For example, in the Iliad Aphrodite helps Paris in the fight against Menelaus and takes him back to his own room so he will be safe. Menelaus was obviously about to kill Paris, but since Aphrodite did not want this, she intervened and saved his life. On page 141 it states, “back at his man he sprang, enraged with brazen spear, mad for the kill but Aphrodite snatched Paris away, easy work for a god, wrapped him in a swirl of mist and set him down in a bedroom filled with scent.” Aphrodite deliberately changed the fate of a man be interfering with a one on one battle to end that could have ended the entire war. Gods act in this manner frequently and change entire stories and fate that either results in less conflict or more destruction.

Overall, gods and mortals have a unique relationship. Mortals have their own free will until a god feels like intervening. At this point mortals act as their own puppets. Gods are definitely stronger and have more powers than mortals which allows them to interact with mortals in a parental like manner. Mortals always obey the gods or suffer dire consequences that may result in death. Gods and mortals have an unbalanced relationship, however, the gods still do care for them occasionally and both mortals and gods have their own strengths and weaknesses.