

Who Is Lord Nrsimhadeva?

People believe all sorts of things will bring them good luck. Many of them are rooted in some legend or tradition. In this case the half man, half-lion Lord Nrsimhadeva is accepted as the tenth incarnation of Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Krishna. Vaishnavas teach that if one remembers Lord Nrsimhadeva when faces with a difficult or dangerous situation, he will protect them, just as he did for His Pure Devotee Pralada Maharaja.

The story begins many thousands of years ago when Lord Vishnu killed the brother of the demonic king Hiranyakasipu because he was waging wars on innocent people simply for entertainment! Hiranyakasipu was so upset about this he threatened to destroy the universe in revenge. So to do that he performed the rigorous austerity of standing on the tips of his toes for 18,250 years (SB.7.3.15p) and became so powerful that the demigods prayed to Lord Brahma to intervene.

Eventually Hiranyakasipu had a son called Prahlada. Prahlada was a great devotee of Lord Krishna right from birth. As a small boy of five he would preach about Krishna to his school friends whenever the teachers left the room and this just infuriated his father who demanded to know who Krishna was. Prahlada explained that because his father was too self absorbed and materially attached to gold and women he would not be able to understand who Krishna was even if he took lessons. (In Sanskrit Hiranya means "gold," and kasipu means "soft bed." Which implies an obsession for attracting women.)

Hiranyakasipu became so angry that he ordered his servants to throw Prahlada to the cannibals and have them pierce his body with tridents and their sharp teeth so they could eat him! Prahlada remained undisturbed by this and continued to meditate on the Supreme Personality of Godhead by chanting the Hare Krishna mantra. Because of his pious actions the demonic flesh eaters were unable to harm Prahlada, which just infuriated Hiranyakasipu ever more!

His father then ordered that he be taken to a small island to endure a huge hurricane. But Prahlada kept chanting Hare Krishna and he was protected again so Hiranyakasipu threw him off a the top of a cliff, but due to his chanting Hare Krishna the Supreme Lord caught him and Prahlada was still not harmed.

Now fully enraged Hiranyakasipu attempted to have Prahlada crushed under the feet of an elephant which also did not work. So then Hiranyakasipu told his guards to throw his son into a very venomous snake pit but because Prahlada was study in his faith and continued to chant Hare Krishna the snakes could not harm him.

Hiranyakasipu then thought is son must have some mystic power so he pretended to be sorry for trying to harm him and in desperation invited him to lunch with the intent of poisoning his food with enough poison to kill hundreds of full-grown men. Rather than eating his food Prahlada first offered it to Krishna. That offering transformed it into prasadam which removed all the poisonous effects and made it as pure as God. When the poison failed, Hiranyakasipu became so enraged he lifted Prahlada above his head and threw him violently on the floor, but Prahlada still remained unharmed! So finally Hiranyakasipu demanded to know where he got his super human powers from.

Prahlada replied that he got his strength from the same place as Hiranyakasipu did—from God. Hiranyakasipu demanded to know who and where this “God” was. Prahlada explained that God is everywhere that everything comes from God. Despite all that had happened, Hiranyakasipu did not believe in God and began pointing to all the things in the palace and asked if God was present in each of them and Prahlada reassured him that He was.



The crowned lion head pendant shown here is a representation of the ferocious Lord Nrsimhadeva who appeared to save the great saint Prahlada Maharaja from his demonic father Hiranyakasipu.

Hiranyakasipu soon pointed to the column at the entrance to his palace and demanded to know if God was in that big pillar. Prahlada reassured him; “Yes, my Lord is in that pillar too!” At this point Hiranyakasipu had fallen completely under the control of his envious anger and bellowed out that he would kill Prahlada’s God by using his mace to smash the pillar!

As Hiranyakasipu began smashing down the column with his powerful mace, Lord Nrsimhadeva, the half man, half lion incarnation of Krishna appeared from the broken pieces and pounced on the demon who could not comprehend what was happening.

“As a snake captures a mouse or Garuda captures a very venomous snake, Lord Nrsimhadeva captured Hiranyakasipu, who could not be pierced even by the thunderbolt of King Indra. As Hiranyakasipu moved his limbs here, there and all around, very much afflicted at being captured, Lord Nrsimhadeva placed the demon on His lap, supporting him with His thighs, and in the doorway of the assembly hall the Lord very easily tore the demon to pieces with the nails of His hand.”

- Srimad Bhagavat Purana Canto 7 “The Science of God”, Chapter 8 “Lord Nrsimhadeva Slays the King of the Demons”, Text 29.

Nrsimhadeva stretched Hiranyakasipu across his lap and with his long nails, he ripped the intestines out of the demon and wrapped them around his head like a victory garland. Hiranyakasipu died instantly on Nrsimhadeva’s blood drenched lap. He was killed neither on the land, sea nor in the air but on the lap of the Supreme Lord. He was killed neither during the day or the night but in the twilight. He was killed by neither beast, nor man, nor weapon but by the long claws of the half-man, half lion incarnation of the Supreme Lord.

The story of Lord Nrsimhadeva illustrates some of the most important lessons about the nature of the demoniac mentality, God and His devotee. Demons are unwilling to surrender to the absolute authority of God even when they encounter it on a first hand basis. Instead they attempt to get what they want by devising their own alternative futile schemes which are very destructive and always fail. God however is never out maneuvered by such feeble efforts and will always show favor to those who act harmoniously with His will. Finally the devotee remains undisturbed regardless of how catastrophic the apparent material situation may appear to be.

Therefore it is understood that when faced with a difficult situation, the devotee will simply take shelter of Lord Nrsimhadeva and upon doing so remains confident that the Lord will protect him in all situations, just as he did with his most beloved Prahlada Maharaja!



The demon Hiranyakasipu attacked Lord Nrsimhadeva with great force, but the Lord captured him and placed him on his lap, supporting him with His thighs. Then, in the doorway of the assembly hall, the Lord very easily tore the demon to pieces with the nails of His hands.