

## Story of PRAHLADA

Hiranyakasipu and Hiranyaksha were born of Aditi, the mother of Asuras. As they were very powerful they were respected by all other Asuras. Since Hiranyaksha caused great harm to the world, Mahavishnu killed him when He incarnated as the Cosmic Boar. His elder brother Hiranyakasipu was greatly angered at this and declared before all the Asuras that he would not rest content till he destroyed Lord Hari who caused his brother's death. Thereafter, sovereignty in order to attain unchallenged over all the worlds, he performed the most terrible forms of austerities. Astonished at his tapas, Brahma appeared before him and said, "No rishi in the past has practised such severe austerity, "You have won me over and I am ready to grant you anything you want." Hiranyakasipu was pleased. He said, "O my Lord, if it please you to give me the boons that I desire, grant that neither Devas nor human beings nor animals nor anyone else of your creation shall be able to kill me. It should be impossible to kill me either during night or day, on the earth or in the sky. No weapon too should be capable of killing me. Besides, neither an animate nor an inanimate thing should cause my death. Grant that I shall be emperor of all the worlds." Brahma granted him all those extraordinary boons and disappeared.



Strengthened by these boons, Hiranyakasipu decided to take revenge against Lord Mahavishnu for killing his brother. He then first conquered all the three worlds and brought them under his control. Later he went up to Vaikuntha to earth and kill Mahavishnu. Then the Lord entered the Asura's heart knowing full well that the Asura, being an extrovert, would not look

Within and see Him. The Asura searched for the Lord everywhere in Vaikuntha and then in all the other worlds. Not seeing the Lord anywhere outside he concluded that Mahavishnu had died.

Earlier, when Hiranyakasipu had left for performing penance, the Devas; attacked and defeated the Asuras. Indra took away Kayadhu, the wife of Hiranyakasipu by force in order to kill Prahlada who was in her womb. Narada intervened and told Indra that the child to be born would be a great devotee of the Lord. There upon Indra circumambulator her as the Lord's devotee was within her womb and left. Then she stayed in the ashram of Narada serving him. At that time Narada taught her and the child in her womb the flawless path of devotion. More than the mother, Prahlada in her womb assimilated these teachings. When Hiranyakasipu returned, Kayadhu joined him and very soon gave birth to Prahlada.

Prahlada, even as a young boy, was noted for his great virtues. Devoted to the holy and learned, exemplary in his conduct, truthful and having mastery over the senses, he was dear to all. Everyone found in him his closest friend. He respected the elders, served holy men and was loving to the poor and afflicted. Though endowed with learning, wealth and beauty, none of this swelled his ego or filled him with pride. He was free from all desires, was established in self-control and remained unmoved. He was an Asura without any of the Asuric qualities. He was supremely devoted to Lord Vishnu for whom he had an ecstatic love which made him laugh and weep and dance in divine ecstasy. The spiritual joy he radiated gave peace to even worldly-minded people.

The Asuras had chosen the sage Sukra as their chief priest. Hiranyakasipu put Prahlada under Sukracharya for learning.

He had decided to make Prahlada an instrument to wreak vengeance on Mahavishnu. He had instructed Sukracharya, not to teach him anything devotional. On the other hand he must teach that Hiranyakasipu was the Supreme God. Sukracharya taught according to the advice of Hiranyakasipu that there was no one higher than Hiranyakasipu and so he alone should be worshipped. But Prahlada did not relish his teachings.

One day Hiranyakasipu took his son on his lap and asked him, "O dear one, tell me what you consider it to be true and good?"

Prahlada replied, 'My dear father, I bow down to Mahavishnu, the cause of the whole Universe. All the created beings are overpowered by body consciousness and are consequently subject to sorrow and suffering. I, therefore, consider that their ultimate good lies in taking absolute shelter in Lord Vishnu, the destroyer of all the sufferings of life.'

When he heard these words: of the boy conveying his unbounded faith in Lord Vishnu, Hiranyakasipu laughed at first, thinking that boy's mind had been perverted by the ill-advice of some devotees of Vishnu. So he warned his teacher to ensure that he did not mix with devotees of Lord Vishnu. When Prahlada returned to his teacher's house, his teacher and others called him to their side and asked him gently, "Dear Prahlada! May you be happy! Tell us the truth. How did you get this idea of worshipping Lord Vishnu? We never taught you any such thing."

Prahlada replied, "Salutation to Lord Vishnu. It is the Lord alone who is the teacher and the protector of this world. Just as iron pieces are naturally drawn to a magnet, even so my mind automatically runs to Him abandoning everything else." Taken aback the teacher scolded the boy angrily and shouted, "Who is there? Bring the cane. This boy is going to bring us disrepute." But Prahlada remained unperturbed.

Sometime later, when the teacher was convinced that Prahlada had learnt the kingly arts, he took him to Hiranyakasipu again. When Prahlada prostrated before his father, Hiranyakasipu embraced him for a long time and enjoyed the highest bliss thereby. Seating the boy on his lap, kissing him on the crown of the head and shedding joyous tears, Hiranyakasipu said, "O Prahlada, dear boy, may you live long! You please tell me about the best lessons from the vast body of instructions you must have been receiving from your teacher during these days"

Prahlada replied, "O dear father, hearing about Vishnu, singing about Him, remembering Him, serving Him, worshipping Him, saluting Him, being His servant, being his comrade and surrendering oneself and everything that is one's own to Him - these are the nine aspects of Bhakti or God-love. If man could be trained to practise devotion characterised by these nine features, that indeed would be the highest education he could have. That is what. I have understood."

Hearing these words of his son, Hiranyakasipu turned towards his teacher and said in great anger, 'You unworthy and perverse teacher! How is it that taking the side of my enemy, you have totally discarded me and put absurd ideas into my boy's head?'

The preceptor replied, "O king, please be good enough to control your anger and not to charge me with this offence. What your son is saying had not been taught to him by me or anyone else. This bent of mind is natural to him." Hearing these words, Hiranyakasipu asked his son again, "O evil fellow, if it is not from the Guru's instruction, how did you come to have this perverse outlook?" Prahlada replied "Dear father, due to lack of control over the senses all beings undergo repeated births and deaths. As they are attached deeply to their possessions, they can never develop the devotional bent of mind towards Lord Vishnu, the Supreme Being, which alone confers liberation. Only when they develop extreme reverence for His devotees will their minds turn to the Lord." Saying thus, Prahlada became silent, absorbed in the thought of Mahavishnu.

Hiranyakasipu was mad with terrible anger on hearing these words of his son. Immediately, he pushed him from his lap to the floor and told his guards, "He seeks to be a servant attending on Vishnu. So even though my son, he is my enemy. Therefore, kill him somehow."

When Hiranyakasipu ordered them thus, the Rakshasa guards, struck Prahlada with their tridents. But by the grace of Lord Vishnu on whose holy feet Prahlada's mind was deeply immersed, all their efforts to kill him proved futile. Seeing this, Hiranyakasipu grew extremely anxious and tried various measures such as having him trampled by elephants, bitten by serpents, etc. to kill him. When the serpents started thrusting their venomous fangs into his body, Prahlada stood cheerfully meditating on Mahavishnu. He did not even feel their sting. On the other hand, the fangs of the serpents dropped out from their mouths and the gems on the heads of the big ones burst out and all the snakes felt sorry for their action.

When Hiranyakasipu sent the Ashta Diggajas, (the eight elephants who bear the burden of this earth) to kill Prahlada, the huge animals bigger than the biggest of mountains, threw the boy to the ground and struck him with their long and pointed tusk. Prahlada lay meditating on Mahavishnu and the tusks that hit the body of Prahlada were broken to bits. Prahlada was then thrown into a pit of fire. But the ferocious fire was not able to burn him as he lay in the fire pit, meditating on Lord Vishnu. On the other hand, he felt that he was lying on a bed of lotuses.

Seeing all this, Hiranyakasipu got terribly worried. The astonished Sukracharya and others advised Hiranyakasipu not to worry, as his son was a mere boy and hence would change his outlook with the advance of age under proper instructions. Their consoling words alleviated his rage somewhat and he sent Prahlada back again to his; Guru. Even though his teachers instructed, him again in worldly values and kingly duties, Prahlada was not convinced of their soundness. So, on one occasion, when the teachers were not present, Prahlada spoke to his classmates about the glory of Lord Vishnu, and the vanity of pursuing worldly goals. Charmed by his words and attracted by his divine moods, they threw away their play things and gathering around him, concentrated their looks and their hearts on him. To them Prahlada taught the way to worship the Supreme Lord Mahavishnu.

These Asura boys, being pure minded, accepted the instructions given by Prahlada and then onwards they did not care for the worldly wisdom of their teachers. The teachers now saw how the minds of the boys were becoming more and more prone to contemplation in solitude. They were very much frightened at this development and reported the whole matter to their ruler Hiranyakasipu. Hearing this, Hiranyakasipu's body trembled in violent rage. He jumped up from his seat, sword in his hand, determined to kill the boy himself. Raining abusive words on Prahlada, Hiranyakasipu, cruel by nature, called his son, who stood before him saluting in all humility and composure, and said, , 'You, debased villain and a traitor to the family, I shall immediately despatch you to the city of Yama, the god of death. How dare you disobey my authority? What is the source of your strength depending on which you fearlessly flout my commands?'

Prahlada replied, "Oh father, not only for me but for the whole world including yourself, the source of strength is the Supreme Being who controls all beings from Brahman down to a blade of grass." Hearing this bold reply, Hiranyakasipu shot back, "Oh fool! You, who indulge in such senseless and arrogant talk, are facing immanent death. Where is that Lord of the worlds of whom you speak, if there is any 'such other than me?'"



Prahlada very calmly replied that Lord Vishnu was present every where. Hiranyakasipu then questioned his son whether his Vishnu was even in the pillar before them. "I see Him there too," replied Prahlada. "I, the master of the universe, am now going to sever your head. Let Hari protect you if he can," Said Hiranyakasipu and he delivered a blow with his fist on the pillar wherein Prahlada had said that he saw the Lord. Immediately, a terrific sound arose from that pillar. Hearing it even all the gods thought that the world was coming to an end. Then to the shocking surprise of Hiranyakasipu, Mahavishnu in the form of a fierce man-lion (Narasimha) I emerged from the pillar. The figure was terrifying to look at. He had fiery eyes, a dagger-like tongue, shaggy neck, and two fangs on each side curved like a crescent moon. His ears stood erect and high. His open mouth and nostrils looked like strange mountain caves. His body had a neck that was short and thick, a chest that was broad. He had innumerable arms on all sides with claws that looked like weapons. The form that stood before Hiranyakasipu was so formidable that none could approach Him and the Daityas and the Danavas all fled away in different directions.

Seeing this awe-inspiring man-lion, Hiranyakasipu thought, This is perhaps a stratagem of that Hari, the master of all magical arts to kill me. But let me see what this Hari can do against me." Thinking thus he rushed towards the man-lion, yelling, and delivered a mighty blow on the Lord with his powerful mace. The Lord caught him in his claws. But he freed himself and approached the Lord again for battle with sword and shield in hand, yelling and moving up and down. But it was the time of sunset and the Lord caught him again and sitting on the threshold of the assembly hall laid him on His thighs and playfully tore open the Asura's body in no time. With the fury reflected in his eyes and with his tongue licking the two corners of His wide open mouth, with the mane of his face and neck reddened by drops of blood and with the loops of intestine of the dead Asura hanging on His neck, the Lord as the man-lion was forbidding r to look at. Throwing aside the dead body of the Asura he killed just with his nail the innumerable followers of the Asura and then sat an the royal throne in all his splendidous glory.

Then all the gods and goddesses, the demigods, the rishis and siddhas assembled at a distance and began to sing His praise. But none of them dared to go near the Lord in this wrathful mood unseen and unheard of before. So Brahma requested Prahlada to pacify the Lord. Agreeing to do so, Prahlada, the great lover of the Lord, advanced slowly towards the man-lion and with palms joined in salutation, prostrated full length on the ground before Him. Seeing the boy prostrating before Him, the Lord was bathed in an upsurge of tender feelings. He lifted him up and placed His divine palms on his head. The touch of the Lord's palms filled Prahlada's heart which melted in divine love. His hair standing on end and ecstatic tears streaming from his eyes, Prahlada extolled in Him every way in a voice tremulous with love. The Lord was immensely pleased with the devotion of the boy and said, "Ask for whatever boons you want. I shall grant them all."

But Prahlada, who knew that all these boons were obstacles to the practice of pure devotion to the Lord, said smiling, "Do not tempt me with all these boons. One who seeks favours and boons from Thee is not a true devotee but only a trader. If you are very particular about giving a boon, deign to grant me the boon that no desire for any boon shall rise in my mind."

The Lord said, "Whole-hearted devotees like you, do not long for any enjoyments here in this world or in the hereafter. Yet I bless you that for a long time to come, you be the head of the Asuras and enjoy the status and powers of that position. Instal Me in your mind and worship Me by dedicating all your actions to Me. Karma will thus lose its binding power and in the end with your reputation for holiness spreading even up to the heavens, you will attain Me."

Prahlada then pleaded, "O Lord! Please do me one favour. My father, out of ignorance, without knowing You as the Lord of all, entertained antagonism towards You and persecuted Your devotees. By Your grace, may my father be purified from the great sins that cannot be expiated in any other way."

Pleased with his words, the Lord said, 'Your father with twenty-one generation of his ancestors had already been purified because of your birth in that family. Wherever My peaceful, even-sighted, holy and pure devotees stay those families and those places get sanctified even if they had been degraded earlier. You shall hereafter be the standard for my devotees to follow. Ascend the throne of your father and with your mind resigned to Me, perform your duties as advised by wise and pious men.'

After receiving the worship of Brahma and others the Lord disappeared from the vision of all. Prahlada made prostrations, to all the gods assembled there. They in turn blessed him and returned to their abode. Prahlada then performed the funeral rites of his father. He was anointed king of the Asuras and ruled the kingdom wisely with his heart ever immersed in the love of the Supreme Lord Mahavishnu.