

NARASIMHĀVATĀRA

Hiranyākṣa and *Hiranyakaśipu* were the two *āsuras* born to Sage *Kaśyapa* and *Diti*. *Hiranyākṣa* was slain by the Lord in his manifestation as *Varāha*, boar. *Hiranyakaśipu* was very angry at the killing of his beloved brother. He vowed to avenge his brother's death and sever the head of his killer. He summoned his ministers and commanded them to destroy the righteous people and the places of sacrifices, so that Lord *Nārāyaṇa* would not get any oblation. The demons began to carry out the commands of their chief. They harassed the righteous people and burnt down the places of sacrifices. *Adharma* became rampant everywhere. The dharmic people began to fear for their lives.

Hiranyakaśipu desired to have undisputed lordship of all the three worlds. He decided to practise severe penance in order to win the grace of Lord *Brahmā*, and went to a valley of Mount *Mandara* for this purpose. Pleased with his austerities, *Brahmā* appeared before *Hiranyakaśipu* and offered him a boon.

Hiranyakaśipu asked for a boon whereby he would not be killed by any being created by *Brahmā* or any one else. He did not want his death to occur either inside or outside, either in the day or in the night. He added that no weapons should cause his death, either on earth or in space, and finally he sought undisputed lordship over all beings. The lord granted all his boons and blessed him. Convinced that he was the most exalted in the entire creation, *Hiranyakaśipu* went about fearlessly doing everything he wanted to do; people suffered under the tyranny of his rule.

One day when *Hiranyakaśipu* was performing his penance, the *devas* attacked the *āsuras*. *Indra* captured *Hiranyakaśipu*'s pregnant wife, *Kayādhū* and carried her away in order to kill the *asura* child in her womb.



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Sage *Nārada* revealed to *Indra* that the baby in the womb was a devotee of Lord *Nārāyaṇa* and releasing her from *Indra*, took her to his *āśrama*. *Kayādhū* served the sage with devotion. *Nārada* used to narrate the glories of Lord *Nārāyaṇa* to her and the child in the womb also used to listen to the teachings. When *Hiranyakaśipu* returned from his penance, *Nārada* sent *Kayādhū* back to her husband's place and soon after she gave birth to *Prahlāda*.

Prahlāda was born as a devotee of Lord *Nārāyaṇa*. He exhibited all virtues in him unlike the people of his race. He remained absorbed in the thoughts of the Lord chanting his name or singing his glories. *Hiranyakaśipu* appointed *Śaṇḍa* and *Amarka*, the two sons of his *Guru Śukrācārya* as teachers for *Prahlāda* and asked them to teach him texts dealing with the pursuits of *artha*, money and power and *kāma*, pleasures of life.

One day, *Hiranyakaśipu* called the five year old *Prahlāda* and asked him to summarise all that he had learnt. *Prahlāda* replied that surrender to Lord *Nārāyaṇa* was the only means for liberation from the sufferings of human life. *Hiranyakaśipu* was shocked to hear this. To prevent the influence of the devotees of Lord *Nārāyaṇa*, he sent the boy to the teachers' residence where he was asked to live and study.

Prahlāda continued to talk words of wisdom and show his devotion for Lord *Nārāyaṇa*. *Śaṇḍa* and *Amarka* tried their best to make him learn things that would please the king. But they could not change *Prahlāda's* mind. *Prahlāda* returned home but much to *Hiranyakaśipu's* discontent continued to talk about the glories of the Lord.

Hiranyakaśipu developed hatred for *Prahlāda* and ordered his killing. His people used various methods to kill *Prahlāda* but they were unsuccessful. The weapons used against him became blunted. Wild elephants trampled on him without any impact. He was hurled down from the top of a peak, and he got up as if nothing had happened. Poisonous snakes could not bite him to death. Blazing fire could not burn even the hair on his body. He was buried alive under the earth, but he continued to live. Frustrated with the failure of all his efforts, *Hiranyakaśipu* sent him back to his teachers' place.

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Once when the teachers were away, *Prahlāda* revealed to his co-students how he had listened to the glories of the Lord from Sage *Nārada* while in his mother's womb. He, then, taught them everything he had learnt from the sage. The teachers came to know about *Prahlāda's* influence on the minds of other children. Annoyed, they informed *Hiranyakaśipu* and sent him back home.

Hiranyakaśipu decided that he himself would put an end to *Prahlāda's* life. He sent for him. *Prahlāda* came and stood calmly before his father who was filled with rage. *Hiranyakaśipu* ruthlessly told him of his intention, but *Prahlāda* only felt sorry for him and asked him again to accept Lord *Nārāyaṇa* as the most powerful. He pointed out how his father's own wrong thinking was his worst enemy, not Lord *Nārāyaṇa*. *Hiranyakaśipu* retorted asking *Prahlāda* to show him the place of existence of Lord *Nārāyaṇa*. He wanted to know why the Lord was not visible in the facing pillar if he truly existed everywhere. He threatened to sever *Prahlāda's* head and challenged the Lord to protect him. So saying, *Hiranyakaśipu* went towards the pillar with a sword in his hand and hit the pillar with his fist.

At that moment, the pillar split with a thunderous noise and the Lord emerged in a terrifying form as *Narasimha*, lion-faced human being. *Hiranyakaśipu* rushed towards the Lord. *Narasimha* pounced upon him and carried him to the threshold. It was the twilight hour. Keeping *Hiranyakaśipu* on his lap, the Lord tore open his chest with his claws and roared. While the celestials rejoiced at the fall of the mighty demon, none dared to look at or approach *Narasimha* who was in full fury due to the offence caused by the demon towards his devotee.

Young *Prahlāda* was asked to pacify the Lord. *Prahlāda* approached him and offered his salutations. The Lord blessed him. *Prahlāda* sang the glories of the Lord, his voice choking with emotions and his eyes shedding tears of joy. The Lord bestowed a long life to *Prahlāda* lasting upto the end of the *kalpa* and offered him all pleasures of the world during his life-time.

II. Complete the Boon

Fill in the correct words to describe the boon that King Hiraṇyakaśipu asked of the Lord.

