FEROCIOUSLY Beautiful

Narasimhadeva is one of the most extraordinary forms of divinity, not only in the Vedic pantheon, but also in all of the world's religions.

The Srimad-Bhagavatam describes his ferocious appearance: long tongue whirling like a dueling sword; protruding, sharp teeth; blazing eyes that eclipsed the glare of the sun; frowning eyebrows; huge mane that expanded the dimensions of his face; erect, wedgelike ears and earsplitting roar that made elephants flee in fear. Yet this dangerous-looking form of God was, to Prahlada, the source of all beauty and joy, the object of glorification with devotion-laden, eloquent prayers. Sridhara Swami, a great Vaishnava-acharya, unravels the mystery of this simultaneous ferocity and beauty of Lord Narasimhadeva, "A lioness appears fearful to all other animals, but is most loving to her own cubs. Similarly, Lord Narasimhadeva appears frightening to the demoniac, but is most loving to his devotees." The wrath of Narasimhadeva is a manifestation of his love for all godly, principled souls, of his heartfelt concern for their protection and of his outrage at those who dare threaten and beauteous.

The amazing divine form of Narasimhadeva manifested at the climax of an equally amazing divine love-story, one of the most dramatic stories of love between humanity and divinity, the Prahlada-Narasimha lila. Prahlada was a five-year old, tender, vulnerable son of a powerful, almost invulnerable, demoniac monarch, Hiranyakashipu. The sweet, well-behaved and humble Prahlada had an ironlike determination to live with spiritual integrity as an unflinching devotee of Lord Vishnu. Hiranyakashipu, who imagined himself to be supreme, was incensed and tried to murder Prahlada. The tender child was miraculoulsy protected by Lord Vishnu. Frustrated by his failure to

even hurt Prahlada, he challenged the child whether the omnipresent Vishnu was also present in the column of his palace. When Prahlada replied affirmatively, Hiranyakashipu struck the column with his powerful fist. Out of the column emerged the ferociously beautiful form of Narasimhadeva, half-man, half-lion, **full God**. After a brief fight, at the moment of twilight – neither day, nor night, Narasimhadeva captured and placed Hiranyakashipu on his thigh – neither the ground, not the air, sat on the doorstep – neither inside nor outside the house, and ripped apart his stomach with his nails – which were neither alive nor dead. Thus Narasimhadeva killed Hiranyakashipu, while preserving all the blessings of invulnerability that the demon had extracted from Brahma.

This pastime, apart from being a historical event that happened millennia ago, also illustrates an eternal spiritual reality. We are all spiritual beings covered by material bodies. Due to the duality of our current existence, we are often subject to an inner conflict between our spiritual nature and our material conditioning. Prahlada represents our selfless, noble, spiritualistic nature, Hiranyakashipu the selfish, ignoble, materialistic conditioning. Prahlada, even while being blasphemed and persecuted, was experiencing unshakeable inner peace and fulfillment. On the other hand, Hiranyakashipu, despite having all the facilities for sensual enjoyment that most people can only dream about, was internally dissatisfied and agitated because his uncontrolled senses were always demanding more and more enjoyment. This illustrates that worldly indigence can't afflict us if we are internally enriched and worldly opulence can't satisfy us if we are internally bankrupt. Our real happiness depends on what is within, not on what is without.

The appearance of Narasimhadeva signifies the manifestation of God within our heart. That divine appearance heralds the ultimate spiritual awakening, an awakening that frees us forever from selfishness and unleashes the latent divinity within us. We are then empowered to use all our talents and abilities for doing the topmost service to humanity and divinity, as did Prahlada after being installed as the king of the world. *Satyam eva jayate.*