

Once upon a time there was an evil king called Hiranyakashipu (which means "dressed in gold") who demanded that everyone should worship him as a god. He thought of himself as the 'Lord of the universe', but his son Prahlad would only worship the great God Vishnu. The king tried to force his son to bow down to him, but Prahlad refused.

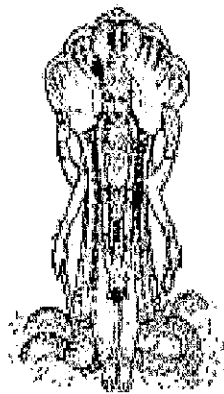
The king ordered his army to kill his son, but Prahlad called on the great god Vishnu and the soldiers lost their strength. Then the king had him thrown into a pit of poisonous snakes, but again Prahlad called on Vishnu and survived. The king tried many ways to kill the boy, but every time Prahlad called on Vishnu and was saved.

In the end, the evil king called on his sister Holika to carry Prahlad into the flames of a bonfire. She had been promised that she had a gift from the gods that would save her from being burnt. The evil Holika cackled with laughter as the flames began to rise around her and Prahlad. But again he called 'Vishnu, Vishnu!' and the power of the Vishnu was so great that Prahlad was protected while Holika was burned.

Hours later, the king came to watch the dying fire. No courtier dared to warn him what he would find. There on the mound of ash sat Prahlad. 'God saved me', said Prahlad, simply. 'I'm sick of your God', said the King. 'Where is this God, then? See if he'll save you from me.' The king drew his sword.

'God is everywhere,' said Prahlad. 'He is in the fire, in water, in the wind and the grass, even in that stone column behind you.'

With that the column broke in two. Out came God but his shape was strange. The upper part of his body was that of a lion, the lower that of a man. He was neither man nor animal. He lifted the king, carried him to the palace door and placed him on his lap. Then he killed him with a single swipe of his great claws. Vishnu made Prahlad the king and he ruled wisely and well ever after.



Vishnu