



Shri Narshimha Chaturdashi श्रीनृसिंहचतुर्दशी

Sanatana Dharma (literally meaning "eternal way of life") extols a unique way of interaction between the Creator and the Creation. While Vedas declare in their every breath the presence of Creator in the every blade of Creation, *Puranas* (literally meaning "ancient historical accounts as fresh as today's news") portray vividly multitudes of occasions when the Creator of Universe called Param Brahman in Vedas, intervened in the functioning of His Creation. And that He does by taking special forms and in special ways. Those special forms of the Param Brahman are called *Avatars*. Avatars of Bhagvan in Sanatana Dharma are numerous. And the Avatars of the Lord are not just in the human form, they are in fish, animal, and even in mixed human-animal forms as well!

Avatar literally means one who descends. So, an Avatar is Param Brahman, Bhagvan, or the Lord descending upon earth in special forms and ways. Each Avatar descends for a particular purpose, to solve a particular inexplicable mess created by we the humans or even devas, the denizens of heavens. In each Avatar, the Param Brahman decides how long He wants to stay on the mortal planet-sometimes just for few hours while in others He is supercentenarian!

While accomplishing this, Bhagvan also enthuses His very nature of Aananda or Pure Joy in those with whom He interacts on this planet, even His dead-set enemies. So, an Avatar enlivens the Creation once again with Joy, so much so that even the reading of accounts of such interactions from Puranas millenniums later would bring joy to humanity.

But how could a mess-salvaging operation be joyous, giving joy even to those who read it ages later? Simply because the Param Brahman performs it through a *leela*, an elegant style that is a rich tapestry of characters and pageant. This leela, unique to each Avatar, is what makes this history so vivid, so enlivening that its mere reading or a narration uplifts its reader's mind to an ecstatic state, in dire contrast to the mundane world that we all experience day in and day out!

Shri Narshimha Chaturdashi is one such major occasion of joy. It celebrates the descent of the primeval Lord Shri Vishnu to restore the turmoil created by a *rakshasha*, Hiranyakashayap. Contrary to popular beliefs, a rakshasa is not necessarily a bizarre being with multiple heads and limbs. Rakshasha simply means someone who induces fear in others so much so that they run for shelter. Hiranyakashayap was one such rakshasha. To seek revenge from the slayer of his brother is what he wanted. Since the slayer was the almighty Bhagvan Vishnu Himself, Hiranyakashayap obtained powerful boons from the *Chaturmukhi Shri Brahma*, the architect-in-chief of the universe, by pleasing him with his severe *tapas*, austerities. Those boons virtually eliminated any possibility of his death during a warfare with Vishnu:

यदि त्वं वरदानाय प्रवृत्तो भगवन्मम ।
यद्यद्वृणोम्यहं ब्रह्मस्तत्तन्मे दातुमर्हसि ॥ ५
न शुष्केण न चार्द्रेण न जलेन न वह्निना ।
न काष्ठेन न कीटेन पाषाणेन न वायुना ॥ ६
नायुधेन न शूलेन न शैलेन न मानुषैः ।
न सुरैरसुरैर्वापि न गन्धर्वैर्न राक्षसैः ॥ ७
न किन्नरैर्न यक्षैस्तु विद्याधरभुजंगमैः ।
न वानरैर्मृगैर्वापि नैव मातृगणैरपि ॥ ८
नाभ्यन्तरे न बाह्ये तु नान्यैर्मरणहेतुभिः ।
न दिने न च रात्रौ मे त्वत्प्रसादाद् भवेन्मृतिः ॥ ९
इति वै देवदेवेशं वरं त्वत्तो वृणोम्यहम् ।

Narshimha Purana, Ch. 40.5-9

"Bhagvan, if you are so inclined to bless me with benedictions, please bless me with these that I ask of you. May I be not killed with a thing that is dry or wet, water or fire, wood, insect, rock or air. May I be not killed with any weapon, spear, or mountain. Nor by a man, devata, asura, rakshasha, or gandharva. Nor by kinnar, yaksha, vidhyadhar, or bhujang. Nor by a monkey, deer and other animals, or Durga or other similar divine mothers. Neither outside or inside the house, during the day or during the night, nor by any other means of death. (all Sanskrit to English translations are by the author).

Blessed so by Brahmaji, the invincible rakshasha came upon a smart plan to take revenge from Shri Vishnu. *Yagya*, Vedic sacraments, and *Dharma*, Vedic way of life, are Shri Vishnu's roots. Yagya and Dharma need Brahmans, Cows, Vedas and

Varnashram (way of life prescribed in Vedas for an individual based on his/her propensities and training as well as the stages of life) for their performances. Therefore, by destroying Brahman, Cows, Veda and Varnashram, Yagya and Dharma would be destroyed, which in turn would annihilate his archenemy, Shri Vishnu!

Hiranyakashayap started tormenting the three worlds. Anyone who offered oblations to devatas through yagya or worshipped Shri Vishnu thus invited his untimely death from his hands:

विष्णुः द्विज क्रिया मूलो यज्ञो धर्ममयः पुमान् ।

देवर्षिं पित्र भूतानां धर्मस्य च परायणम् ॥

यत्र यत्र द्विजा गावो वेदा वर्ण आश्रम क्रियाः ।

तं तं जनपदं यात सन्दीपयत व्रश्चत् ॥

तस्मिन् कुटे अहिते नष्टे क्रूत मूले वनस्पतौ ।

विटपा इव शुष्यन्ति विष्णु प्राणा दिवोकसः ॥

(Shrimad Bhagvatam Canto 7, Chapter 2, Shloka 11, 12, and 9).

"The root of Vishnu is the performance of Vedic rituals by twice-born individuals because Yagya and Dharma are the foundations of Vedic rituals. Vishnu is the shelter of Devatas, Rishis, Forefathers, Living Beings and Dharma. (11). So go wherever there are twice-born people, cows, Veda, and the performance of Vedic rituals. Set fire to that town and cut them off. (12). Just as on cutting the root of a tree, all of its expansions such as branches and leaves dry up dead, the same way on killing the most deceitful Vishnu, all devatas whose very life is Vishnu will be annihilated as well." (9).

So much was his fear that Bhagvan Shiva and devatas went to appease Bhagvan Vishnu and seek His protection. Lord Shiva successfully pleased Bhagvan Vishnu by chanting His one hundred names. Hiranyakashayap's end was now finally in sight, except for a problem.

The problem was that Brahmaji's boons to Hiranyakashayap were not easy to break. They were so many, so comprehensive that they virtually eliminated any possibility of killing this demon. Even Shri Vishnu, whose own energy manifests as multitudes of planets ever revolving without even a millisecond of error, has to think for a solution!

On the most auspicious day of Vaisakh Shukl Paksha Chatrurdashi or the fourteenth day in the waxing cycle of Moon in the Vedic month of Vaisakh (in May), such a divine solution became manifest. A strange form of Shri Vishnu descended on earth. Upper half of the body of lion ("shimha") and human ("nara") torso, Bhagvan Narshimha appeared from a royal pillar in the palace of Hiranyakashayap:

सत्यं विधातुं निज भूतय् भाषितं व्याप्तं च भूतेषु अखिलेषु च आत्मनः

अदर्शयत अति अद्भुत रूपं उद्वहन स्तम्भे सभायां न मृगं न मानुषं (*Shrimad Bhagvatam 7.8.17*)

"To prove that the statements of His servant Prahalad are correct and that He is present in all beings and things, a very strange form emerged from a pillar of the royal court. Strange was that form because it was not fully that of an animal or a human being."

That stranger was Shri Vishnu, who has taken the form of Narshimha, half-man and half-lion. Narshimha killed this rakhasa in a moment, just like an eagle puts an end to the life of a monstrous snake. None of the boons of Brahmaji were broken- Narsimhadev was neither a man nor an animal, the nails that He used to tear apart this snake were not weapons, the time when he was annihilated was of dawn, which was neither day or night, and the steps of the palace were neither outside nor inside of a house!

A tumultuous crowd of denizens from heavens sang praises to Bhagwan Narshimhadev. Prahalad fell down at His feet and recited this *stuti*, adulation:

ॐ नमो भगवते तुभ्यं पुरुषाय महात्मने

हरये अद्भुत सिंहाय ब्रह्मणे परमात्मने (*Shrimad Bhagvatam 7.10.10*)

"Salutations to You, O Supreme Lord! You are seated in everyone's heart, most merciful, vanquisher of all sorrows, the wonderful lion, and You yourself are Param Brahm Parmatma!"

Bhagwan Narsimhadev blessed Prahalad and all those like him :

यत्र यत्र च मद्भक्ताः प्रशान्ताः सम् दर्शिनः

साधवः समुदाचारः ते पूयन्ते अपि कीकटाः (*Shrimad Bhagvatam 7-10-19*)

"Wherever there are my devotees who are peaceful, who regard all things impartially, righteous, and with proper conduct and behavior, those places, even if full of filth, become purified."

In our Bharat Bhumi, temples of Bhagvan Narshimhadev abound all over. The most famous among them is the Ahovilam or Ahobalam (literally, "O Great Strength") Mandir complex in the Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh. The Mandir complex has nine deities of Bhagvan Narshimhadev, each in a particular mood and form, from the one in His fierce (ugra) form, as Ahobila Nrisimha Swamy who is the presiding deity of the temple, to the graceful (soumya) form of Malola Narsimha Swamy (Ma=Lakshmi, Lola= beloved, thus 'Malola' means beloved to Lakshmi) where the Lord is seated with his consort, Shri Lakshmi in His lap. The temple complex is maintained by the Ahovilam Math. Up on the foothills of the mighty Himalaya mountains over a thousand miles away in Jyotimath (Joshimath, Uttarakhand state), Bhagvan Narsimhadev is the presiding deity in the Narshimha Mandir. Bhagvatpad Adi Shankaracharya, the author of the famous Lakshmi Narshingha Karavalamban Stotram and Lakshmi Narshingha Pancharatanam, established this Mandir many centuries ago. The Lord blesses devotees with His protection as they commence their arduous travel for the BadriNath pilgrimage up in the Himalayas over 3000 meters above the seal level.

Bhagvan Narshimhadev's basic nature is of giving protection to anyone who takes His shelter. And that protection one may need could be in a very inexplicable situation or simply to carry on the day to day activities. It does not matter. All one needs is to call upon Him with faith, just as Prahalad who believed that He is there to protect him from the sword of his own demon father.

Perhaps the best way to take His shelter is to worship Him on the Narshimha Chaturdashi day, the day He took avatar. One can fast on this day until the sunset and then conduct His puja. If fasting is not possible, then another simple way is to do His puja in the evening, just as the Suryadev, Sun, is receding in the western horizon. Put a picture of Lakshmi Narshimhadev on your home alter and light a *deepak*, a lamp, in front of Him. If possible, one should chant His 108 Names, Narshimha Ashtotra, together with your family. If chanting those 108 names is not possible, just chant:

ॐ नमो भगवते नर्सिंघाया (Om Namō Bhagwate Narshinghaya) (*Shrimad Bhagvatam, 5.18.8*)

Puranas declare:

समस्तपुण्यफलदं कलौ विष्णोः प्रकीर्तनम् ॥ ६१ (Narshingha Purana, Ch. 54.61)

"In the Kaliyuga, Shri Vishnu's nama kirtan, (be it as Narayan, Ram, Krishna, Lakshmi Narshimha) gives fruits of all punyas!"

So, come, let us celebrate Narshimha Chaturdashi and get His divine protection for us all and for all we do!