**Maya’s Cosmic Conspiracy**

By Narasimha das

*Srimad Bhagavatam* explains repeatedly that the material world is like an elaborate mirage. An ordinary mirage in the desert can fool thirsty animals and delirious human beings, but sane and intelligent people easily understand that it is only a visual effect.

Illusions created by elaborate political and social conspiracies are also not foolproof. As one savvy politician once said, *“You can fool some of the people all of the time, or all of the people some of the time. But you can’t fool all of the people all of the time.”*

Maya’s conspiracy of illusion, however, is an exception to this rule. It fools all the people all the time. *Bhagavatam* says that this illusory world, the material world, is no more real than a mirage in a desert. And yet it, according to *Bhagavatam*, it **“appears factual even to great sages and demigods.”**

Once upon a time a terrible unexplained darkness was spreading throughout the universe. Alarmed at this, the demigods approached Lord Brahma and appealed to him to explain what was going on. Lord Brahma assured the demigods that it was part of the plan of the Supreme Lord. Krishna’s plans are not easily understood by conditioned souls.

Lord Brahma and some of his direct sons, as well as other exalted demigods in Brahmaloka and Tapaloka, are generally above the illusions of material existence. How is that possible? Because they are pure Vaishnavas; they are always conscious of their relationships with Lord Narayana or Lord Krishna. The demigods in Svargaloka are also highly advanced in knowledge but most are still attached to the material world. This is the rub: material attachment. This is the reason even great sages and demigods remain under Maya’s spell.

When Lord Chaitanya was asked to define what is a Vaishnava, He replied simply, *“Asat sanga tyaga, ei vaishnava achar.”* A Vaishnava is defined as one who has renounced all attachment to material existence. Only humble devotees can transcend all illusion and remain unaffected by all illusory conspiracies—even those that are fundamental pillars of *maya-shakti*.

How do devotees transcend illusion through *asat-sanga*?

Every embodied soul must deal with the material world and material circumstances, and this can become entangling. The art remaining transcendental in this material world was elaborately taught by Srila Prabhupada as the process of pure devotional service. If we fail to hear from Srila Prabhupada with constant and rapt attention, then we may become attracted to hearing the defective ideas and theories of conditioned souls. Hearing the ideas of mundane persons, especially regarding spiritual life, is a most dangerous form of *asat-sanga*.

Srila Prabhupada once commented that his western disciples did not have enough fear of *maya*. Lord Chaitanya’s great devotees, on the other hand, almost always showed the example of being afraid of *asat-sanga*. Sri Mukunda, one of Lord Chaitanya’s personal associates, used to go sometimes to a meeting of learned pundits who were tainted by impure philosophies. Likely one of his motives was to preach, but when Lord Chaitanya found out, He immediately banned Mukunda from His association. Similarly, Lord Chaitanya banned Chota Haridas and His servant Krishnadas for the same thing--***asat-sanga.*** Specifically, in the case of Sri Mukunda, he was hearing the talk of persons who were not pure devotees.

There is always a question of motive. When our motive is pure, Maya Devi herself will help us come out of the darkness of illusion—even though we may not be great yogis or pundits. This is the only way—*asat sanga tyaga*. Lord Brahma advised the anxious demigods to be patient and depend on the infallible plans of the Supreme Lord.

The Lord’s pastimes are enacted in this world to help us come out of illusion. We are further assisted by great teachers, the pure devotees, who recite, glorify and explain these pastimes. We should always have faith that Krishna is in control. Krishna has His own plans. The plans of men and demigods are ineffective without the sanction of Krishna. Pure devotees never fear the conspiracies of mundane men, but they always respect the power of *maya-shakti* and show by their examples the importance of *asat-sanga tyaga*.

Srila Prabhupada elaborates: **“…Because a devotee is freed from all contaminated material association, he is not affected by the miseries of material existence. Even though he appears to be in the material world, he is not affected by the miseries of the material world. How is it possible? There is a very good example in the activities of the cat. The cat carries her kittens in her mouth, and when she kills a**[**rat**](https://prabhupadabooks.com/d/rat)**she also carries the booty in her mouth. Thus, both are carried in the mouth of the cat, but they are in different conditions. The kitten feels comfort in the mouth of the mother, whereas when the**[**rat**](https://prabhupadabooks.com/d/rat)**is carried in the mouth of the cat, the**[**rat**](https://prabhupadabooks.com/d/rat)**feels the blows of death. Similarly, those who are** [***sādhavaḥ***](https://prabhupadabooks.com/d/sadhavah)***,* or devotees engaged in [Kṛishṇa](https://prabhupadabooks.com/d/krsna) consciousness in the transcendental service of the Lord, do not feel the contamination of material miseries, whereas those who are not devotees in [Krishṇa](https://prabhupadabooks.com/d/krsna) consciousness actually feel the miseries of material existence. One should therefore give up the association of materialistic persons and seek the association of persons engaged in Krishna consciousness, and by such association he will benefit in spiritual advancement. By their words and instructions, he will be able to cut off his attachment to material existence.”** (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 3.25.24, Purport)

**“…This kind of**[**yoga**](https://prabhupadabooks.com/d/yoga)**practice, in which the mind is always fixed upon the Supreme Personality of Godhead in devotion, results in liberation in this very life. The person who performs such acts gets in touch with the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Lord**[**Chaitanya**](https://prabhupadabooks.com/d/caitanya)**, therefore, approved the process of hearing from realized devotees about the pastimes of the Lord. It does not matter to what category of this world the audience belongs. If one meekly and submissively hears about the activities of the Lord from a realized soul, he will be able to conquer the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is unconquerable by any other process. Hearing or associating with devotees is the most important function for self-realization.”** (SB. 3.25.26, Purport)

Unfortunately, it is sometimes seen that when neophytes on the spiritual path are advised to carefully avoid *asat-sanga*, they become defensive. They don’t like such “negativity”. Because Srila Prabhupada’s books are full of such repetitive “negative” advice, they sometimes prefer to hear from pseudo-spiritualists and others who do not stress the importance of *asat-sanga*. Or they simply fail to study all of Srila Prabhupada’s books. Either way, these are symptoms of those severely contaminated by *asat-sanga*: they continue to speculate because they cannot carefully hear from Srila Prabhupada.