

VIRTUAL IṢṬAGOṢṬHĪ

The Movement in the West

What Works, and What Is Still Missing

A summary of proceedings

Recorded and broadcast live, 7 August 2026

PARTICIPANTS

His Holiness Hridayananda das Goswami

Gauranga Das

Brahmatirtha Das (Bob Cohen)

Hosted by Damodar Das

Version 1.0

Editorial Note

This is a summary of a live, unscripted conversation. It is organised by theme rather than by chronology, because the discussion circled back on its central questions several times and the argument is clearer when the strands are gathered together. Nothing has been added that was not said; where a point has been drawn out of several scattered remarks, that has been done in the speaker's own terms.

Three cautions on sourcing, which the reader is asked to carry through the whole document:

- The working transcript was machine-generated. Personal names, Sanskrit terms and place names were rendered unreliably and have been reconstructed editorially. Appendix B lists the reconstructions and the residual uncertainties.
- Statements attributed to Srila Prabhupada in this summary are reported from memory by the speakers in live conversation. They are presented here as recollections and paraphrases, not as verified quotations, and none should be reproduced or cited as a quotation without being checked against Vanisource or Vedabase.
- Scriptural references are likewise as cited by the speakers in conversation, some of them corrected mid-sentence. Appendix A lists them with the verse identifications that appear to be intended, flagged for verification before republication.

Where a speaker's own emphasis matters to the sense — particularly the repeated appreciations offered alongside the critiques — that emphasis has been preserved rather than compressed away.

1. The Question on the Table

The session was the second in a sequence. It picked up a conversation broadcast a few days earlier on how the Hare Krishna movement is faring in the West, and on what the most favourable conditions for its proliferation there might now be.

The host framed the problem in three movements: an explosive birth in the West; a marked slowing since roughly the mid-1980s; and, arguably, a change of direction rather than simply a loss of pace. The question for the session was not whether that slowing had occurred — no participant disputed it — but what accounts for it, and what would restore vitality.

The session was also framed as an exercise in a lost practice. The host observed that istagosthi is a vital strategy Srila Prabhupada introduced, and that its scarcity is itself a symptom worth attending to. He took Prabhupada's own definition as the working brief: followers of the spiritual master discussing how the mission of the spiritual master might be accomplished.

“We are almost just scratching the surface today. This is a semicolon, not a full stop.” — the host, in closing

2. The Participants and Their Standpoints

The value of the session lies partly in the fact that the three guests were arguing from three genuinely different professional vantage points, and were explicit about it. Each returned repeatedly to the discipline he knows best.

Hridayananda das Goswami

An early joiner recruited personally by Srila Prabhupada to the reconstituted GBC and nominated by him among the successor gurus; a professionally trained historian of religion; founder of the Krishna West initiative. He described himself as the last living member of ISKCON trained by Prabhupada as a Western GBC. He argued throughout from the sociology and history of religion: what conditions cause new religious movements to establish themselves durably outside their region of origin.

Gauranga Das

An IIT graduate of 1993 who joined the movement in December of that year after a very short professional stint. A founding figure of Govardhan Ecovillage, a project undertaken on the vision and insistence of Radhanath Swami. He holds a doctorate (DBA) from the Swiss School of Business Management on Vedic faith-based organisations as agents of transformation for implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and was appointed in 2020 as one of one hundred UN Faith for Earth councillors. He serves as convenor of the GBC succession committee. He argued from demonstrated practice and from the Indian growth record.

Brahmatirtha Das (Bob Cohen)

Known to most readers as the questioner of Perfect Questions, Perfect Answers; one of the original speakers in Life Comes From Life; a central figure in the revived Bhaktivedanta Institute, which is now designing the TOVP exhibits alongside its publishing; and co-director, latterly in a mentoring capacity, of ISKCON Resolve. He studied climate change and sustainability from the 1970s and conducted early atmospheric CO₂ research. He argued from education and from the movement's intellectual formation.

Brahmatirtha joined intermittently and away from his desk, and so had less airtime than the others; the host acknowledged this on air.

3. Spirituality in Action: The Govardhan Ecovillage Case

Gauranga Das set out the project's logic rather than its inventory. Govardhan Ecovillage originated in Radhanath Swami's vision, itself drawn from instructions Srila Prabhupada gave in the New Vrindaban farm-community period. Its organising idea is the connection of three principles: spirituality, sustainability and social impact.

The three harmonies

He expressed the project's philosophy as bhakti understood as harmony, expressed at three levels:

- **Harmony of the self with the divine** — spirituality.
- **Harmony of the self with nature** — sustainability.
- **Harmony of the self with community** — social impact, expressed through work across some five hundred villages.

The practical expression includes a solar-powered goshala, organic farming, water sustainability and rainwater harvesting, waste and sewage processing, plastic-to-oil conversion, and biodiversity conservation, with more than ten thousand farmers' lives reported as affected. The project holds accreditation with UN agencies.

The research frame

His doctoral work addressed five questions: why Vedic faith-based organisations align with the SDGs; what their key features are; what thematic dimensions are involved; how these translate into action; and how their impact can be measured. The design was a qualitative exploratory one grounded in grounded theory and value-focused thinking, using semi-structured interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and document analysis with purposeful and snowball sampling, centred on Govardhan Ecovillage as the primary case with reference to Mayapur and Vrindavan initiatives.

He noted that prior FBO–SDG scholarship had concentrated on Christian, Islamic and Jewish organisations; his contribution was to bring Vedic faith-based organisations into that literature. The philosophical alignment he found maps sanatana-dharma as interconnected duty, ahimsa, seva as selfless service, and reverence for prakṛiti onto the UN's five-P framework — people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. Five thematic dimensions emerged: ecological harmony, community resilience, ethical governance, spiritual prosperity and partnership building, touching all seventeen SDGs.

He also placed this in a longer institutional arc. Srila Prabhupada established the Bhaktivedanta Institute in the early 1970s to open a conversation between science and religion. In 2017 the United Nations established UN Faith for Earth on an analogous premise: that although the UN is a data-driven and science-based body, policy instruments alone have not arrested climate change, and that changing individual behaviour requires religious leaders capable of influencing their congregations. Climate change, on this reading, is a problem arising from human intention — from fear and greed — and the work is to raise intention to the level of duty and love.

Authenticity as the entry point

Asked what actually converts interest into engagement, Gauranga Das argued that the prevailing Western demand is for authenticity: whether a tradition genuinely practises what it professes. His illustration was a group of twelve to fourteen students from a university in Utah on a ten-

day visit; by the fourth or fifth day, ten of them were attending mangala-arati. Asked why, they explained that having seen nature-friendly practices demonstrably grounded in the philosophy, they wanted to understand the philosophy those practices came from.

They saw the application, and on the strength of the application they wanted to know the philosophy and the tradition.

The same sequence operates in the yoga programmes: a standard 200-hour teacher training runs over twenty-eight days, with two hours of philosophy and two hours of satsang every day — some four hours daily in which a great deal of Bhagavad-gita can be conveyed.

What is transferable

Pressed on what the West might take from this, he named three elements and was explicit that scale is not the constraint.

- **Community.** There is a global ecovillage network and a substantial Western constituency looking for alternative ways of living. Had the movement sustained Prabhupada's farm-community vision in the West, it would now be sitting at the table with policymakers. The ball was dropped.
- **Sustainability.** An ecovillage does not require a hundred acres; one acre is sufficient. The model is simple living and high thinking organised around food, water, energy and waste, with philosophy at the centre.
- **Loving relationships.** What Western people are looking for is love, exchange and sensitivity. A city temple can be such a space: somewhere people encounter community, dignity, respect and sensitivity on walking in.

4. Building the Core: The Case for a Mainstream, Knowledge-Bearing Movement

Hridayananda das Goswami's contribution was the session's sustained critique, and it needs to be read alongside the praise he attached to it, which was neither perfunctory nor occasional. He described Gauranga Das as one of the movement's best leaders, his guru as one of its best gurus, and Govardhan Ecovillage as one of its best projects globally — a judgement he had already offered in the previous broadcast. He said explicitly and repeatedly that nothing in his argument was intended to minimise that work.

“What both of you are saying is necessary, but not sufficient.”

Adjacency is not spiritual adjacency

The host offered “adjacency” as a name for the strategy of finding constituencies proximate to the movement's concerns. Hridayananda das Goswami accepted the strategy and rejected the

framing. Common ground on ecology is worth finding and he supports finding it — but people can be adjacent on a noble and yet ultimately mundane idea without being spiritually adjacent. Good neighbours are necessary. They are not the same as people who take up Prabhupada's teachings seriously.

The public identification problem

His central sociological claim was that movements of this kind survive and become major world religions outside their region of origin by building a core: by attracting qualified, capable people willing to stand up and publicly identify themselves as followers.

On this test, he argued, the record is poor. A long list of famous and influential people have encountered good devotees over sixty years. What they have in common is that almost none of them has wanted to be publicly identified with the mission. George Harrison was the exception who proves the point — he simply said he was a Hare Krishna, and the effect was extraordinary. The question he put was how many yoga teachers and how many environmentalists are willing to say publicly that they follow Prabhupada and chant Hare Krishna.

He located the obstacle not in the outreach projects but in the movement's ordinary public conduct: the behaviour of the mainstream Hare Krishna movement in the West makes that step difficult to take.

Why niches will not carry the weight

Two illustrations carried this argument.

On yoga: a Chapman University study asked Americans why they take yoga classes. The respondents were roughly eighty per cent women and twenty per cent men, and the motivations were overwhelmingly about the body. Yoga is mainstream; serious philosophical interest in yoga culture is not. A powerful religion of the kind the Mormons built cannot be constructed on that foundation, however many individuals do become devotees along the way.

On ecology: in presidential-election issue rankings, environmental concern typically appears somewhere around twenty-third. Educated people care about it more, but they already have hundreds of avenues for environmental involvement. They will respect a movement with an outstanding ecology project — respect is precisely what such a project earns — but respect is not joining.

He put the general principle sharply: one cannot build a mainstream religion on the foundation of a youth ministry. The ISKCON book of Genesis is college students joining a revolutionary movement. Student programmes remain important and should continue. But a world religion is not built out of a series of small niches.

Coherence without uniformity

When the host suggested this implied a single strategy, Hridayananda das Goswami declined the implication and offered a better statement of it. Not everyone need be in lockstep. He himself is not an ecologist and not particularly drawn to hatha yoga, but he can speak intelligently about both without disparaging either. The analogy he used was a team in which people play different positions, and universities that specialise in different fields while all being respectable.

What must be shared is not the concentration but the quality: intelligent preaching, appreciation of what others have built, and a local expression that is coherent with, consistent with, or complementary to the flagship projects. He noted that he actively brags about Govardhan Ecovillage, and that watching its output educates him and equips him to speak more credibly to environmentalists.

The harmony that is missing

This produced what may be the session's most useful single formulation. Taking up Gauranga Das's language of harmony, he argued that the harmony people are not finding is between the flagship project and the local centre.

Students from Notre Dame, Berkeley, the University of California and City University of New York have an extraordinary experience at the ecovillage. But they are not going to move to Maharashtra. If they pursue their interest at all, they will pursue it at their nearest temple — Chicago, Berkeley — and what they find there is not continuous with what impressed them. They need not find another ecovillage or another yoga programme. They need to find intelligent people, and a community whose centre of gravity is knowledge rather than ritual.

Ritual, knowledge, and the money trail

His diagnosis of the drift was blunt. Prabhupada's emphasis was knowledge: print the books, read the books, distribute the books. In most major cities of the Western world the movement has become puja-centric. Everyone quotes Bhagavad-gita 4.34; the knowledge that verse commends is explained in 4.33, where Krishna states that serving him through knowledge is superior to material sacrifice. Deity worship and love of the deities remain essential — the two rails of the same track, pancharatiki and bhagavata — but the inspiration they provide is inspiration for the primary work.

Follow the money trail and you will find the rat. Compare what is spent on temples and elaborate puja with what is spent on education.

From this he pressed a set of questions the session did not answer: Where is the ISKCON seminary in the Western world, training people at least to master's level and ideally to doctorates, so that they become learned teachers? Where are the devotees teaching Krishna consciousness in higher education?

He also asserted, without developing it, that there are major philosophical and historical errors in mainstream ISKCON — naming the handling of the concepts of causeless mercy and ajnata-sukriti — and that these are related to the institutional pattern he was describing.

The call for hard analysis

Running underneath the whole contribution was a procedural argument. He acknowledged the reluctance of Vaishnavas to criticise Vaishnavas and said he respected it, while insisting that an organisation shy of self-criticism does not stay in business long. What is needed is tough, no-nonsense analysis from people who love Prabhupada, love ISKCON and are committing their lives to it, but want the truth spoken: what are we doing wrong, and how do we fix it.

His closing remarks made this personal and specific, and it is the sharpest thing said in the session. He observed that when he offers a critique grounded in the sociology and history of religion, the response is not engagement but deflection — each participant returns to his own field of expertise. He does not perceive ISKCON's leadership as recognising that the history and sociology of religion is a legitimate academic field in which some people hold expert knowledge, and in which a serious critique deserves better than “thanks for your opinion.” He noted that he would never say that to Gauranga Das about ecology.

This should be read as a claim about how expert argument is received institutionally, not as a claim to have been personally slighted; he framed it as a hope rather than a grievance.

5. Education as the Movement's Primary Mission

Brahmatirtha Das's contribution converged on Hridayananda das Goswami's from a different direction, and added one distinct warning.

The diaspora: best friends, or a drift into ritual servicing

He recounted his own history as, on his account, the first highly successful life membership director in America in the 1970s, working in Houston as the first wave of visas brought Indian engineers to the oil industry before Silicon Valley existed. He recalled Prabhupada saying the Indians are our best friends, and — with the qualification that this described the situation at that time — that they were one step from Krishna facing the wrong way while the Westerners were ten steps from Krishna facing the right way.

He regards Indian devotees as the movement's best possible allies, because they understand the culture; some of his own closest collaborators are Indian devotees. His caution is about what happens without deliberate intent: the first outreach centre he built was converted into a Hindu mandir, and temples can end up selling blessings for new cars. The risk is that instead of making the diaspora partners in outreach to the West, the movement drifts into servicing ritual demand. He was careful to say this is not universal and that much good work is being done.

Heads first

His second theme was the Bhaktivedanta Institute. If any semblance of varnashrama is to be built, it has to start with heads. Under Hridayananda das Goswami's guidance the Institute has shifted its focus from conferences — which had stopped producing material of sufficient quality — to education, and specifically to educating devotees, who he considers are frequently under-schooled in two areas: philosophy, in that they may know the philosophy of the Gita without knowing the principles of philosophy; and science, where presentations are often dated and thin. He included himself among those with much to learn. He also sees the Institute as a bridge between East and West at the intellectual level, since many educated Indian devotees understand Krishna and are excellent at what they do.

He recalled Sadaputa Das as his best friend and as fitting the definition of a brahmana precisely: brilliant, and unable to balance a chequebook.

The founding analogy, and the scale problem

His argument for priority rested on a historical comparison: when America was founded, the first thing the settlers did was establish Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth and Princeton. They understood that an educated brahminical class — not their term — was necessary for a society to succeed. He noted a precedent within the movement's own history: in 1996 Harikesa Swami mounted a major education push, funded from Russian stock-market gains, that jump-started ISKCON education as no one has since.

He credited the educational component of Govardhan Ecovillage explicitly, including its work improving the lives of villagers and setting an example that villages can improve. His reservation was about proportion rather than quality:

It is a drop in the bucket. We have all these temples — how much education are we doing?

6. Why the West Stalled: Three Readings

The host put the question directly: why has the movement declined in the West, and what would restore its dynamism? Three answers emerged, and they are not mutually exclusive.

The inheritance reading

Gauranga Das offered the metaphor of a multi-millionaire father who leaves his fortune to his children. On his figures, by 1977 Srila Prabhupada had roughly 5,500 disciples and 108 temples; only twenty to thirty of those disciples were Indian, and only five of the 108 temples were in India. Prabhupada therefore accumulated an enormous asset in the West, of the West, for the West. The question for a generation that receives millions from the previous one is whether it grows the asset or squanders it.

The host connected this to a related metaphor he had received — the sons of the father, who inherit the founder's entrepreneurial spirit and pursue his business, versus the sons of the mother, who enjoy the institutional assets. Hridayananda das Goswami flagged discomfort with gender analogies of that kind, and the host acknowledged the objection while noting he was reporting the metaphor as it had come down to him.

The leadership-stability reading

Gauranga Das's substantive answer was about stability. From the early 1980s onward the Indian leadership — he named Gopal Krishna Goswami, Jayapataka Swami, Bhakti Charu Swami, and later Radhanath Swami from the 1990s — worked with a degree of synergy and stability that he regards as the single most important factor in ISKCON's growth in India, from five or six temples in 1977 to some 350 today. India's billion Hindus matter, but he ranks leadership stability first.

His reading of the West is the mirror image: the 1980s brought a shake-up in exactly that stability. Given the raw talent among the early Western leaders, he judges that had stability been maintained, the movement would have gone to another level. His comparative illustration was that a leader of another India-origin movement visited the Palace of Gold in 1981, was inspired by it, and from 1982 began a programme of stone temple construction — the movement had a clear lead in the West, and particularly in North America, and did not keep it.

He also declared a present concern in his capacity as convenor of the succession committee: the shortage of Western faces in leadership positions in the West. He was careful to add that, not having been part of the Western movement himself, he did not want to comment on the details from anecdote, and confined himself to what worked in India and what he felt had not worked in the West.

The institutional-error reading

Hridayananda das Goswami's answer was that the causes are discernible and that a competent historian or social scientist would have no difficulty identifying them — but that the movement has been unwilling to conduct the analysis. He named the ritual/knowledge inversion and the philosophical errors around causeless mercy and ajnata-sukriti as related symptoms of a single pattern, and declined to expand further in the session so as not to berate anyone. The unfinished business here is significant: the session established that he believes he has the diagnosis, but did not extract it.

This is the most obvious agenda item for a subsequent session.

7. Knowledge or Embodiment? The Session's Sharpest Exchange

The most productive disagreement was between the host and Hridayananda das Goswami, and it was substantially a matter of emphasis that both eventually named as such.

The host's position

Drawing on the ecovillage discussion and on the observation that Krishna consciousness is itself an embodied practice, the host argued that Westerners are in a phase where embodied practice registers more powerfully than philosophical argument. This is not an argument against teaching philosophy, which he acknowledged as a primary responsibility. It is an argument about proof: in an environment of distrust, disbelief and doubt, an embodied practice constitutes a different order of evidence from an argument. He invoked ethos, pathos and logos — logic addresses only one part of what actually changes people, and credibility comes from seeing the thing lived. He also drew a distinction between reach and effect: whether a speaker changes lives, and how deeply, is a different question from whether he gets views.

The response

Hridayananda das Goswami rejected the categorical form of the claim while accepting the qualified one. Powerful knowledge is powerful, and millions of people are actively looking for good arguments. His illustration was Jordan Peterson — offered with the explicit caveat that he neither endorses nor condemns him and disagrees with much of what he says — as a case of a scholar who sold millions of books, shifted a cultural conversation across the political spectrum, and whose audience was not primarily interested in his personal life. He also disputed the underlying statistics.

His decisive evidence was autobiographical. What transformed his life was reading Prabhupada's abridged Bhagavad-gita, at a point when he knew nothing of Prabhupada's personal life beyond having seen him speak once in Berkeley and having been struck by his integrity. Many devotees, asked what brought them, will say they read a book, heard a lecture, or had the teachings explained — all before they had examined anyone's life as an example. He added that he receives letters almost daily from educated professionals who reconsidered or joined on the strength of a presentation or the books, from people who do not know him personally.

He grounded this scripturally in the four kinds of people who approach Krishna, of whom the one who comes for knowledge is described as the best — and in the verse a few later where the person of knowledge surrenders. Reading knowledge as “a minor thing” he considered an inaccurate reading of a great many verses in the Gita and the Bhagavatam. He also noted the social shape of the argument: the varna system is a pyramid, wider at the base, and Prabhupada himself expressed documented concern that the movement was attracting a certain constituency and not enough educated people, knowing it would not work without them.

Not elitism but social structure

Anticipating the obvious objection, he was careful. All souls are equally dear to Krishna, as the Gita states in many places. But society has a particular structure, and there is a way of bringing a society to respect and eventually participate in a mission. Prabhupada came to the West, on his

account, to put a head on a headless society; the anatomical metaphor of social structure goes back to the tenth book of the Rīg Veda. This is not discrimination and not being an egghead. It is practical social engineering.

He supported the point with the first instruction he ever received from Prabhupada. As a student at UC Berkeley in 1969, living in the temple, he asked the temple president whether he should stay in school or serve full-time; the temple president referred him to the regional secretary, then a brahmachari named Tamal Krishna, who referred him to Prabhupada — an illustration in passing of how personal the movement then was. Prabhupada wrote back insisting he stay in school and finish his education, because he would need to be well educated in order to preach effectively to educated people. It was not framed as optional.

His final qualification matters. Learning alone is insufficient and, in a person who is not practising, useless: if someone speaking intellectually turns out to be a bad person, it does not work. But when a devotee is genuinely practising bhakti-yoga, is devoted to Prabhupada, and has knowledge, then when he speaks it has the ring of truth.

Where it landed

The host's summary was that the three must operate in concert, and that the inconsistency between an outstanding experience at Govardhan Ecovillage and a different experience at a local temple is itself what sows doubt. Both parties named the result as violent agreement: the Krishna conscious worldview has enormous amounts to offer, and the movement has lost the voice — the confidence or the ability — to make intelligent arguments and express its positions in the world.

8. Proposals Surfaced

No participant offered a programme, and the host was explicit that settling on a way forward was neither achievable in one session nor the participants' business to determine. What follows is the set of concrete proposals that surfaced.

From Gauranga Das

- Empower the coming generation of Western youth, understood to include both those raised in the movement and those newly connecting to it, and equally those already running Western outreach initiatives.
- In practice, this means current leaders going out of their way to reach out, create opportunities, build capacity, encourage and support.
- Fund it. Priority in leadership is demonstrated by budget allocation. Youth empowerment work is unlikely to generate income and will sit on the expense side; the question is whether leadership has the integrity to treat it as an investment in the future and put real money behind it.

- Replicate the transferable elements of the ecovillage model at whatever scale is available — community, sustainability and loving relationships — including inside city temples.

From Hridayananda das Goswami

- Build the core: pursue the qualified, capable people whose public identification with the mission is what establishes a movement durably.
- Address the mainstream public conduct of the movement in the West, since that is what determines whether cultivated people are willing to take further steps.
- Reorient institutional spending from ritual towards education, and establish seminaries and graduate-level training in the West so that ISKCON becomes known for education.
- Recognise the sociology and history of religion as a legitimate field of expertise and engage its findings accordingly, rather than treating expert critique as one more opinion.
- Ensure local centres are coherent with, consistent with or complementary to the flagship projects — intelligent, knowledge-centred, and appreciative of what others have built — without requiring uniformity of focus.

From Brahmātirtha Das

- Make education the primary mission for 2026 and reallocate a portion of ritual expenditure to it.
- Educate devotees specifically in the principles of philosophy and in current science, both areas of acknowledged weakness.
- Use the Bhaktivedanta Institute as an East–West intellectual bridge.

From the host

- Capable leadership, treated as the first-order issue.
- A coherent strategy — understood, following Hridayananda das Goswami's clarification, as a set of shared principles everyone abides by rather than a single template everyone follows.
- A properly funded and well-conceived digital outreach strategy. Many devotees are active online; ISKCON has no coherent voice online. As he put it, the movement probably produces more of its own bad press than anybody else does.
- Attractiveness and embodied experience, alongside relevance — meeting people's actual issues and concerns.
- Accessibility, which he credited Krishna West with having substantially addressed.

9. Where They Agreed, and Where They Did Not

Held in common

- The state of the movement in the West is not good, and the diagnosis is overdue rather than premature.
- Education is under-resourced relative to ritual, and that imbalance is consequential.
- Govardhan Ecovillage is an outstanding project; no participant qualified this.
- Local expression and flagship projects are currently discontinuous, and that discontinuity costs the movement people.
- Prabhupada was, in matters of presentation, dynamic, agile and adaptive, while uncompromising on basic principles — a point Hridayananda das Goswami has written on, citing a purport in the Fourth Canto urging that all risks be taken and all adjustments made in presentation, and that what works in India will not necessarily work in the West.
- The movement has lost its voice in public argument.

Left unresolved

- **Sufficiency.** Whether authentic embodied projects, pursued at scale, would in fact build the core — or whether they earn respect without producing adherents. This was stated three times and never settled.
- **Sequence.** Whether application leads to philosophy (the ecovillage experience) or knowledge leads to commitment (the conversion accounts). Both were evidenced; neither generalisation was tested against the other.
- **The diagnosis itself.** Hridayananda das Goswami maintains that the causes of the Western decline are identifiable and that he can identify them, and declined to set them out. The session did not press him.
- **Reception.** His claim that expert critique is met with deflection went unaddressed by the other participants — arguably illustrating it.
- **The diaspora question.** Brahmatirtha Das's warning about drift into ritual servicing was not taken up by anyone.

10. From the Live Comment Stream

Comments arrived asynchronously and were addressed in a block near the end. Commenters' names were unreliably rendered in the transcript and are omitted here.

- A proposal that the holy dhama itself be showcased through environmentally minded projects — noting that a visitor to Vrindavan currently encounters sixteenth-century infrastructure carrying twenty-first-century load. Taken as read; not discussed.
- A viewer working as a counsellor urged that healing and recovery programmes are needed worldwide, particularly for Srila Prabhupada's senior women disciples and for those raised

in the movement, and observed that the need has gone unaddressed for decades. Hridayananda das Goswami agreed without qualification, acknowledged the limits of his own contribution, and framed the work as a matter of teamwork across differing capabilities.

- A comment that devotees must understand and address the public's own issues and concerns, and inject Krishna consciousness into the various arenas of society. Agreed, with the observation that Prabhupada's own model included stating plainly what was wrong before deciding how to fix it. The host identified this as precisely the relevance question he returns to.
- A comment on second generations not building on entrepreneurial founders' legacies, which the host connected to the inheritance metaphor: what came unearned is accompanied by skills not yet learned.
- A question about whether a movement more oriented to the Western mainstream would still be Krishna conscious if the mahamantra were removed. Hridayananda das Goswami answered that Krishna West is in some respects very conservative: chanting the mahamantra, explaining Bhagavad-gita As It Is, and offering prasadam is, done well, a perfect programme. He mapped it onto Plato's tripartite account of human life in the Republic — kirtan engaging the emotions, class engaging the intelligence, prasadam engaging the senses — and said he finds himself increasingly admiring the way Prabhupada did things, and his absolute integrity.
- A comment on embodied practice as more convincing than argument in a low-trust environment, which precipitated the exchange summarised in section 7.

11. Closing

Gauranga Das closed by invoking Srila Prabhupada's pranama mantra and stating the concern shared by leaders that the original intent of Prabhupada's coming to New York must be fully restored in due course.

Hridayananda das Goswami closed by thanking the participants, describing each as bringing a particular expertise, and asking that the sociology and history of religion be recognised as one such expertise.

The host closed by noting that the practice of istagosthi is an art the movement has either lost or never properly acquired, and that working out how to do it well is itself important. He characterised the ecovillage not as a template to be rubber-stamped and boilerplated, but as a working model from which principles can be gleaned — demonstrating how the movement makes a difference in the world, optimising around the visitor experience, and earning credible endorsement.

The conversation is a semicolon, not a full stop.

Appendix A: Scriptural and Source References

Listed as cited by the speakers in live conversation, with the verse identification that appears to be intended. All require verification before republication; none should be treated as a checked citation on the strength of this document.

Bhagavad-gita

- **3.33** — even a person of knowledge acts according to his own nature. Referred to in the exchange on masculine duty and disposition.
- **4.33** — sacrifice performed in knowledge is superior to material sacrifice. Central to the ritual/knowledge argument; cited as the verse that explains the knowledge commended in 4.34.
- **4.34** — approach a spiritual master by submission, inquiry and service. Cited as universally quoted and insufficiently read alongside 4.33.
- **5.18** — the equal vision of the learned. Cited in support of all souls being equally dear (spoken as a partial verse; identification provisional).
- **7.16–17** — the four kinds of people who approach Krishna, of whom the person of knowledge is described as the best. Cited repeatedly.
- **7.19** — after many births, the person of knowledge surrenders. Referred to as the verse coming shortly after the four types.

Srimad-Bhagavatam

- **4.8.54, purport** — cited as urging that all risks be taken and all adjustments made in presentation to attract Western people, and that what works in India will not necessarily work in the West. The speaker corrected himself mid-sentence from Fourth Canto chapter 28; verify chapter and text.

Other

- **Rig Veda, tenth mandala** — the anatomical metaphor of social structure, with the brahmanas as the head (Purusha-sukta, RV 10.90; identification editorial).
- **kalau sudra-sambhavaḥ** — quoted as indicating the prominence of sudras in Kali-yuga; source not stated in the session and requires tracing.
- **Plato, Republic** — the three aspects of human life: intellectual, emotional and sensory.
- **Chapman University** — study of American motivations for taking yoga classes; roughly 80% women, 20% men, motivations predominantly physical. Full citation not given.

Statements attributed to Srila Prabhupada

Each of the following was reported from memory in conversation. Each requires sourcing before quotation.

- That he came to the West to put a head on a headless society.
- That the Indians are our best friends; and that they were, at that time, one step from Krishna facing the wrong way, while the Westerners were ten steps from Krishna facing the right way.
- That rituals are secondary to preaching.
- That the pancharatriki and bhagavata paths are the two rails of one track.
- Print my books, read my books, distribute my books.
- His written instruction to the young Hridayananda das Goswami in 1969 to remain in school and complete his education in order to preach effectively to educated people.
- His documented concern about the constituency the movement was attracting and the need for more educated people.
- His definition of istagosthi as followers of the spiritual master discussing how the mission of the spiritual master might be accomplished.

Appendix B: Note on Names and Transcription

The working transcript was machine-generated and rendered Sanskrit names and terms unreliably. The following reconstructions have been made editorially and should be confirmed before publication.

- **Confident:** Hridayananda das Goswami; Gauranga Das; Brahmatirtha Das (Bob Cohen); Radhanath Swami; Srila Prabhupada; Sadaputa Das; Tamal Krishna; Gopal Krishna Goswami; Jayapataka Swami; Govardhan Ecovillage; Krishna West; Bhaktivedanta Institute; ISKCON Resolve; TOVP; Palace of Gold; New Vrindaban.
- **Probable, verify:** Bhakti Charu Swami (named among the Indian leadership of the 1980s–90s); Harikesa Swami (the 1996 education push); Hansadutta (Berkeley temple president, 1969); the co-director of ISKCON Resolve, whose name was not recoverable from the transcript and has been omitted.
- **Uncertain, treated cautiously in the text:** the movement whose leader visited the Palace of Gold in 1981 was rendered in a way suggesting the Swaminarayan tradition, but the rendering was too corrupted to name with confidence and has been left unnamed; the Utah university sending students to the ecovillage was described only by state and religious affiliation; commenters' names have been omitted throughout.

Prepared from the raw transcript of 7 August 2026. Version 1.0. The customary Prabhupada epigraph has been left out pending selection of a verified quotation.