

Realizations from the Vaisnavi Retreat

Rukmini, Washington D.C., USA: The retreat was like a multicolored bouquet of flowers offered at the lotus feet of Srila Prabhupada and Radha Giridhari. I have an endless list of wonderful jewels I collected. It was just like an opening of the lotus of the heart. I could understand who I am—Caitanya dasa. I got a glimpse into the hearts of the many Vaisnavis who had assembled at the feet of Govardhana. We went deep into the Vedic literature while remaining focused on Srila Prabhupada's mission. I loved the authenticity of everyone's mood and their desire to sustain the taste of dedication to Srila Prabhupada's mission. When we, Srila Prabhupada's disciples, spoke, there was a sort of pouring of the heart in the mood of "this used to be us." We could see that there are new devotees who are actually carrying the thing forward and this is very encouraging. The Vaisnavis were wonderful, deeply inspiring, advanced and advancing, and intergenerational!

Srimati, Vrndavana: I was overcome by the culture of open-heartedness. It was okay to be who we are, with our faults, limitations and all. I appreciated the striking absence of petty rivalry and competitiveness. There were so many powerful vaisnavis, but no power games. Such a wonderful breath of fresh, invigorating air! Everyone was eager to participate in a madhyama aspect of Lord Caitanya's mission. They had come with firm faith and the desire to preach and reach out to each other. I was very impressed to see so many powerful Vaisnavis. Most of my service requires me to be alone, and in most of the places where I have lived there haven't been many other women, especially not peers. It was also wonderful to see all the younger women from so many different places engaged in seva and exchanging their inner feelings. Without them, it would not feel like all the ground work Srila Prabhupada had the older devotees make was successful. Whatever the pure devotee desires, Krsna will fulfill. All these devotees have come to help Srila Prabhupada, just like the devotees who came when he was present on the planet. He is present here. He is present everywhere--wherever his books are being distributed and read. He is present in his deity, his pictures, his video recordings. Let us keep that momentum. Let us not lose that taste which we got here. Let it keep us going.

Svayam Rasesvari, Vallabha Vidyanagara, India: The heart surgery was successful, helped by the verses from Sri Caitanya Caritamrta, the Siksastakam meditations and the beautiful verses by Srila Rupa Goswami. It really worked to open up our hearts. The prevailing atmosphere of care was amazing. We could just feel that in the air. And then to cap it all off we went to Surabhi Kunda. When Vraja Lila had us pray for each other, my partner Anju brought tears to my eyes. I looked around and saw that many had tears in their eyes too. Our hearts were so open by the whole atmosphere. The programs that were presented were just wonderful. We had a hard time picking them all the jewels. I personally loved the Queen Kunti verses and I got the desire to study them more. Another thing is that all of us were struck by the service attitude, particularly of the younger women--like Sivaratri and others. Prema Lila was at the prasadam line every time. She was out there at the night snacks serving tea as well. I never saw her eat. That service attitude inspires us to develop the same mood. I loved Vraja Lila's presentation on caring. We have to develop this caring attitude in ISKCON, particularly between the women. The Kaliya story was also so well presented. Urmila Mataji brought it around and showed us the symbolism, how it relates to our lives and how we can take inspiration from it. Sometimes we get too bogged down with being a woman that our spiritual life suffers. It was so nice this didn't happen at this Retreat. The focus on Srila Prabhupada brought us all together.

Mangala Candrika, Radhadesa, Belgium: It was an amazing sanga! The atmosphere was safe and peaceful. The group was intimate. There was an unstoppable flow of affection and love. We felt very close to our heart. Why was it only four days! We usually pray to Srila Prabhupada for his mercy, but at the retreat we could see that we can access him through his disciples. We are very grateful to all the daughters of Srila Prabhupada. Their presence gave us a feeling of shelter, protection and care. Many times we used to be afraid of Srila Prabhupada disciples and felt unable to approach them. But having them all around here gave us a lot of inspiration, hope, and strength to go forward in our devotional life, so that maybe when we reach their age, we can be someone like that. I really want to thank them from the core of my heart for taking their valuable time to come here and be part of us and show us their mercy and care.

Gaurangi, New Mayapur, France: We go to many festivals, attend many programs, but we do not get this kind of atmosphere. There was so much open-heartedness, no feeling of envy or competition or who is doing what. Everyone opened up, a little the first day, more the second day, much more the third day and on the fourth day everyone could do what they felt like doing. We did not have a sense of “this can be done and that cannot be done.” Everyone was natural.

Siva Ratri, Mayapur (14 years old): I feel like jumping into japa instead of just being mechanical. Also, because of the pujari seva I got to do, I had a very deep realization of what it means to be regulated and to serve Krsna as a person.

Campakalata, Govardhana: The sanga was very powerful. We could connect with vaisnavis from all over the world and experience the mood of friendship, caring and acceptance, forming new friendships. There was a relaxed, open atmosphere. We felt like we could be ourselves. We could share freely. I live here at Govardhana. But it's when the devotees come that I really feel I'm in the dhama, that Govardhana comes alive for me. We have to do this every single year.

Krsna Priya, Vrndavana: The Vaisnavi sanga was so warm, inspiring and uplifting. The knowledge that was shared was so valuable. It was wonderful to learn from senior devotee women who have so much realization to share. Hearing from Srila Prabhupada disciples in this atmosphere was quite different from our previous experiences. They could be very free in their memories. They could express different difficulties that they had gone through. It was so inspiring for us to know that through all of their struggles they're still here. I appreciated my association with Srimati. The two little prescriptions I got for my heart surgery related very personally to my spiritual life. I appreciated the chance to be together in Krsna consciousness, feeling united with each other in Krishna's service. It was wonderfully organized. I felt at home.

Bhadra, Mumbai, India: I forgot all my material life. I suppose others did too. I felt Srila Prabhupada's presence all around. Srila Prabhupada's disciples gave me the courage, the goal, the aim of my life, and the way how to remain fixed in the Krsna consciousness movement in whatever condition we may face. I feel I will be a different person when I go back.

Jahnvi Priya, Surat, India: I really needed that heart surgery. For the first time in my life I could see how contaminated and offensive my heart is. The door was tightly closed. Now I know what I need to work on. Witnessing how Srila Prabhupada's disciples struggled and remained fixed, I became inspired to be more determined in serving the mission. I pray to the best of thieves to please steal my heart so I can chant with the right purpose. And I will surely try to teach my

kids the tongue twisters by Srila Rupa Goswami. Time was short and there was so much to get. We will relish that the whole year, and I think before the year ends, we should come here again to relish it again. Whatever we gather, we will distribute. Thank you so much. We came as strangers but we are leaving as friends and relatives.

Lila Sakti, USA: I joined for a day only. Going to Surabhi Kunda and Govardhana and doing all these prayers and listening to the prayers of Kunti Devi and Prasanta's Siksastaka prayers made a deep impression on me. The sankirtana was so wonderful. I felt I must have done something in my previous life to be able to be here. I want to come again.

Kamala, Iran: In this retreat I found humility, pridelessness, love, Krsna's different energies, harmony and exchange of transcendental bliss. The teachings of Srimati, Prasanta, Narayani, Urmila and Vraja Lila gave me the inspiration to go beyond my superficial realizations, deeper and deeper into the ocean of transcendental bliss. The presentations were in harmony, all connected with each other. There was actually only one topic for this Vaisnavi Retreat, i.e. how to spiritually and emotionally support each devotee, especially ladies, who are more emotional than men. At festivals, when there is a mixed group, ladies sometimes feel depressed because they cannot freely open their heart and share realizations. Here it was so much easier and we could touch on some deep, intimate points like divorce and how to exchange emotions in the family. I wish these Vaisnavi retreats can be continued.

Nirguna, Vrndavana: What did it for me was the depth of sincerity in the presentations and the kindness of the devotees. I am grateful for having been able to offer two pujas today—Tulasi puja and guru puja. I felt honored.

Mahadevi, Vrndavana: I am overwhelmed and humbled by the association of the devotees. The retreat was wonderfully organized and love flowed not only from Srimati, Narayani, Urmila, Prasanta, and Vraja Lila, but from their assistants as well. The service attitude was very enlivening. Srila Prabhupada's movement becomes very real for me in the association of so many nice devotees and it increases my desire to want to become more serious, more loving, and more sensitive to the devotees all around us and to what Srila Prabhupada wants of us in this lifetime. Narayani mentioned how Srila Prabhupada says our concern is to love Krsna. And of course that also means to love His devotees. The knowledge we receive from each other is meant to be used for this purpose. Vaisnavi association is ecstatic—so much sharing of love and openness of the heart. We're aspiring not to be this body. Among Vaisnavis there is so much affection and family feeling that we feel that one day we can be part of Krsna's family in Goloka Vrndavana.

Urmila, USA: The best parts of the retreat—going to Surabhi Kunda, begging for forgiveness and experiencing that a dark cloud and burden was removed from our hearts; always being able to see on the notice board what was happening, even the income/expense statement (!); the assistants investing in wanting devotees to be happy; the bonding between the teachers and participants; feeling connected and cared for; being with just women and appreciating what the women have to offer; being able to be simple and be ourselves. The four days didn't feel either rushed or drawn out. There was a perfect sense of time. Everything was wonderful and we couldn't say what was best, although I really liked Prasanta's Siksastaka. But when there is a feast with a thousand good preps, how do you define which one is the best? We got very deep. When everybody said "Jaya Radhe" in unison at Surabhi Kunda it was as if time went away and there was a little glimpse of something eternal.