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Hare Krsna—A Spiritual Force at the Antinuclear Rally

Report from Bonn

On a warm, clear day last June; Ronald Reagan came to Bonn. So did at least 300,000 peace demonstrators. And so did twenty-five members of the Hare Krsna movement. Each—Reagan, the peace marchers, and the devotees of Krsna—presented a program for demilitarization and for reducing world tensions.

President Reagan told the German federal parliament that his program for a massive buildup of U.S. military strength was a sure sign of American determination to live up to its commitment of protecting its allies. "You are not alone," he reassured the German people. Then, after brandishing the big stick, the President spoke softly, repeating his proposals for eliminating intermediate-range nuclear weapons in Europe and reducing strategic nuclear arms.

Reagan also introduced a new peace plan by suggesting that NATO and the Warsaw Pact nations mutually cut back their conventional forces. Referring to the demonstrators, he said, "To those who march for peace, my heart is with you. I would be at the head of your parade if I believed marching alone could bring about a more secure world. . . . The question is how to proceed." The President's speech was interrupted twenty-one times by applause.

The peace marchers did what peace marchers do everywhere: They paraded with signs and banners, sang songs and chanted slogans, and listened to impassioned speeches by antinuke leaders. Joseph Beuys, Germany's top modern artist and sculptor, entertained the crowd with an ironic song of his own composition: "Sonnenschein Statt Reagan" ("Sunshine Instead of Reagan"—a play upon the German word *regen*, which means "rain").

But there were problems amid all the idealism. The Bonn demonstration was organized by an uneasy alliance of the German Communist Party (DKP) and the Greens, a coalition of young and politically aware environmentalists who define their ideology as an alternative to both capitalism and communism. At one point during the planning stages the Greens pulled out, accusing the DKP of manipulating the event for Moscow's interests. They grudgingly attended the demonstration anyway, but kept a low profile. Peace groups sponsored by the German Lutheran Church stayed home, fearing that the demonstration would appear too anti-American. Peace groups from Holland also stayed away, fearing that the demonstration was too nationalistic. Gerd Bastian, a former general

in the West German army who had retired from his post as the commander of a panzer division to stump for peace, was on hand to represent the peace-loving members of the establishment. But radical hecklers interrupted his speech. And another speaker ruefully noted that too many demonstrators, and the devotees of Krsna.

President Reagan's speech, for all its charm and enthusiasm, was contradictory, in keeping with the Alice-in-Wonderland logic of the arms race itself. It called to mind that favorite cliché of the Vietnam War: "To save the village we must destroy it." To preserve the peace we must build more weapons—and talk about disarmament. The Russians have already promised the world that if America boosts its military might, they will follow suit, missile for missile, bomb for bomb. And as both sides increase their already astronomical capacity for overkill, they *talk* about reducing it.

As for the peace demonstrators, they clearly showed the flawed premise underlying their materialistic idealism: "We are our bodies, so let's save them." As soon as we define our existence in physical terms, we become entangled in all sorts of dualities: heat and cold, happiness and distress, love and hate, birth and death. The Bonn peace march was beset with a myriad of dualities: Communists versus environmentalists, liberals versus radicals, Germans versus Dutch, young versus old, the serious versus the whimsical—all hoping for peace versus war in an existence of life versus death.

Dualities of pleasure and pain, birth and death, peace and war are insurmountable on the bodily platform. Therefore, if we want real peace we must rise above the bodily platform and understand ourselves to be spiritual beings, unchanging and indestructible.

We are *not* our bodies; we are eternal spiritual souls living in temporary conglomerations of matter called bodies. This was the message of the Hare Krsna devotees on that fine June day in Bonn. We are seeking peace in this human life only because as spiritual entities we hanker for that half-remembered "peace of God, which passeth all understanding." This is the eternal peace of Lord Krsna's own spiritual kingdom, where everyone centers his love and his energy on God. In God's kingdom there are no dualities, no pain, no death, no war—only perfect harmony.

This harmony and perfect peace are available even in this material world, once we reject the petty distinctions between nations, races, and ideologies (all of which stem from our misidentification with the body) and accept our true oneness as spiritual souls, servants of the Supreme Soul, Krsna.

Now we are experiencing the duality of matter and spirit because we are out of harmony with Krsna's desire. We have forgotten Him by misusing our free will.

In this Age of Quarrel, we can reestablish our relationship with Him by the simple, sublime process of chanting Hare Krsna and accepting the Lord's mercy in the form of *prasadam*, vegetarian food offered to the Lord in love. By centering our lives on Krsna instead of on the struggle to preserve the ever-dying fleshy covering of the soul, we can experience peace by His grace, even in this material world.

Those who argue that Krsna consciousness is too simple and naive to solve the complex problems of the world are themselves too complex—they're unwilling to let go of the dualities that bind them. The struggle against the death of the body is hopeless. But hope for peace matures into realization as soon as we take a step in the right direction—away from material duality and toward spiritual reality.

The Krsna consciousness movement is itself the testing ground of this principle, and the proof of the principle is available for anyone to experience.

—Suhotra dasa