

# Why?

BOB DYLAN



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“Blowing in the Wind”

“Every Grain of Sand”

*Book by*

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“Blowing in the Wind”

“Every Grain of Sand”

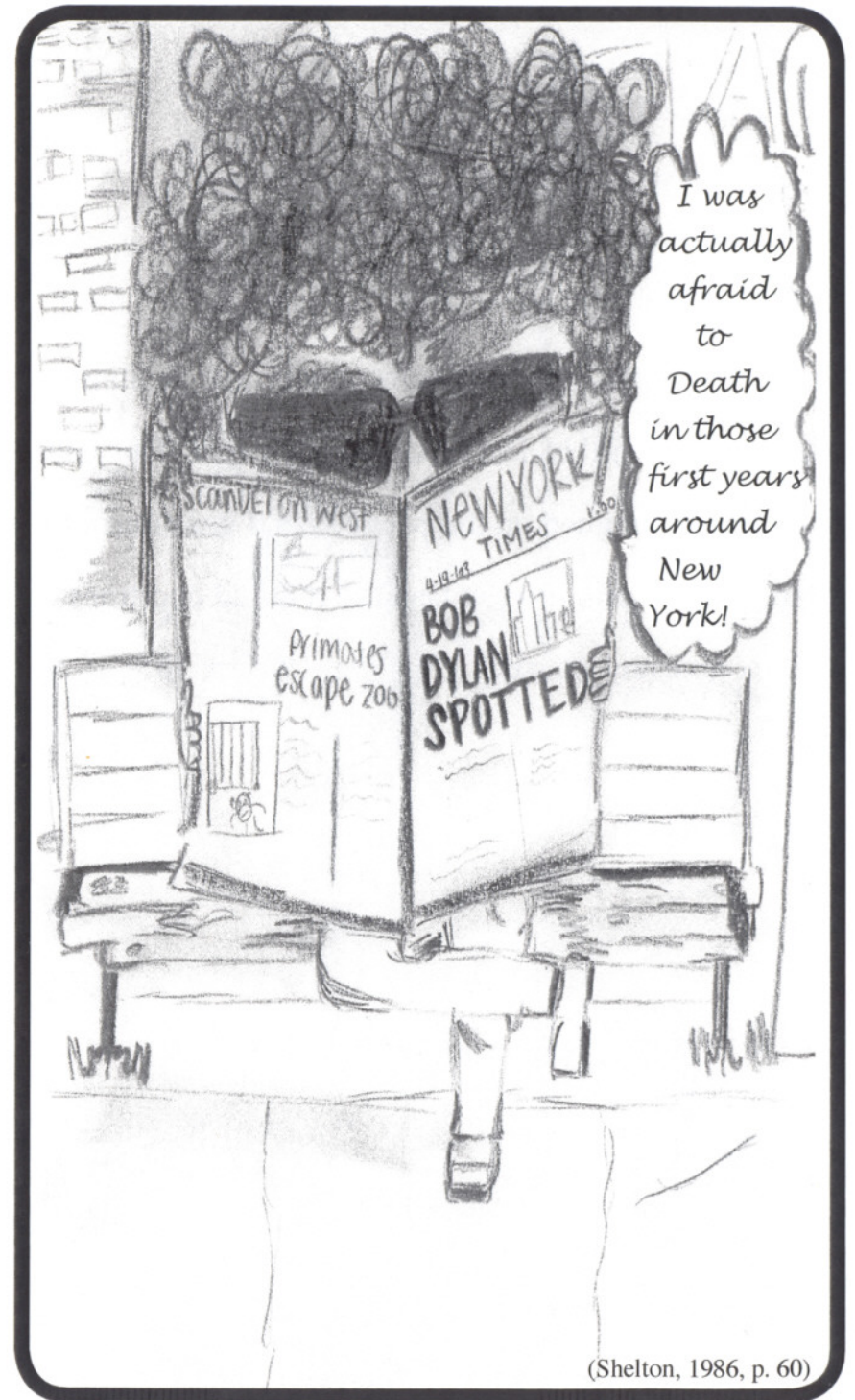
1963



(Williams, 2004, p. 63)

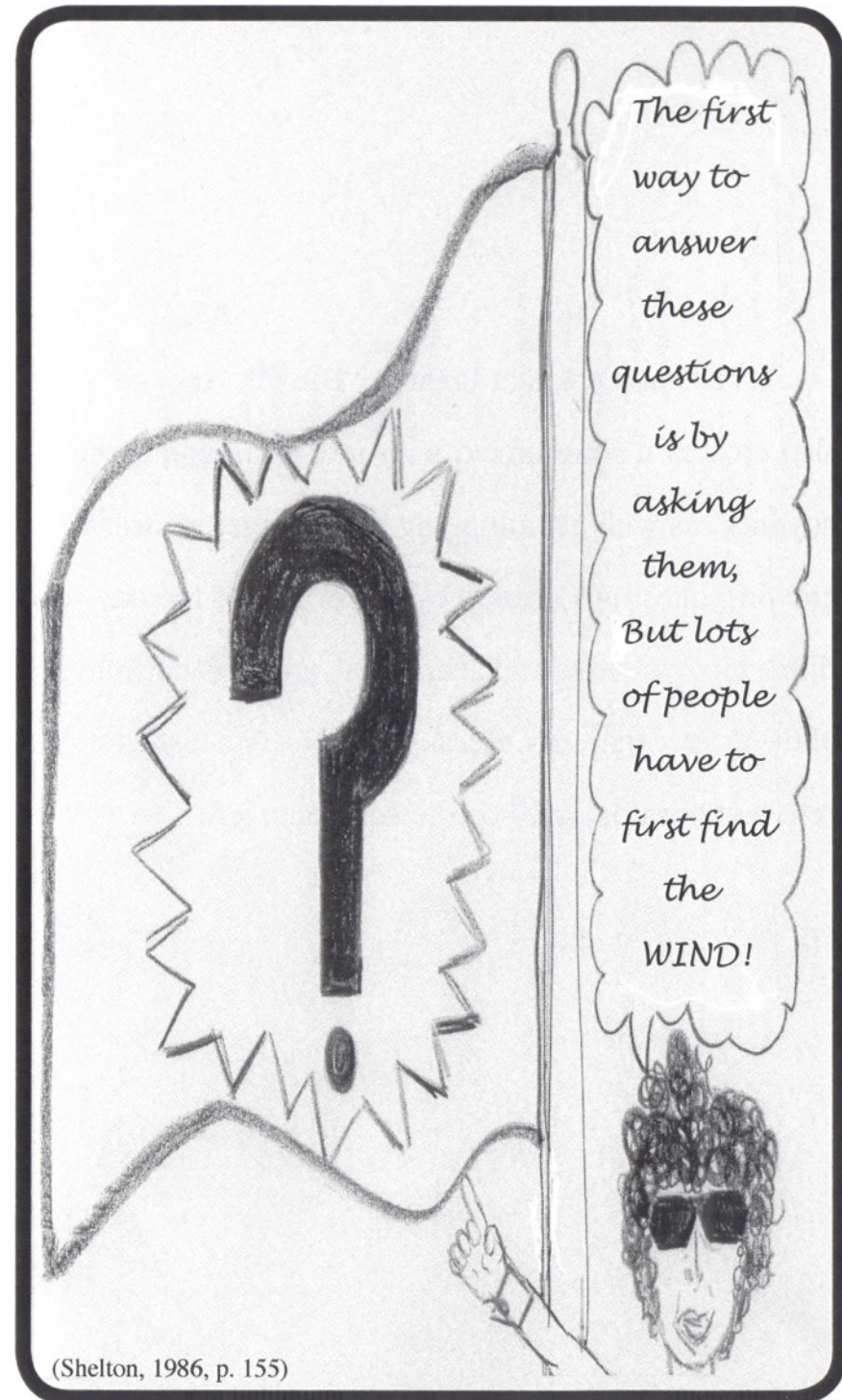
In 1963, Bob Dylan was just breaking into music as a professional. He became one of the greatest, if not the greatest, poet, lyricist and songwriter of his time. He often played the role of a rebel throughout his career. With his songs, Dylan has provided a running commentary of a restless age. His piercing images and puzzling lyrics described the mood of a generation. For this, he was made spokesman. Yet, the identifiable and isolated Bob Dylan won't even admit to being a poet.

By 1963, Bob Dylan had written some good songs. “Many people referred to him as a genius. He thought that was bull. Even though he had written ‘Blowin In The Wind,’ at this time he was not pleased, because he never was happy with the song. He wrote the song in ten minutes” (Shelton, 1986, p. 60).

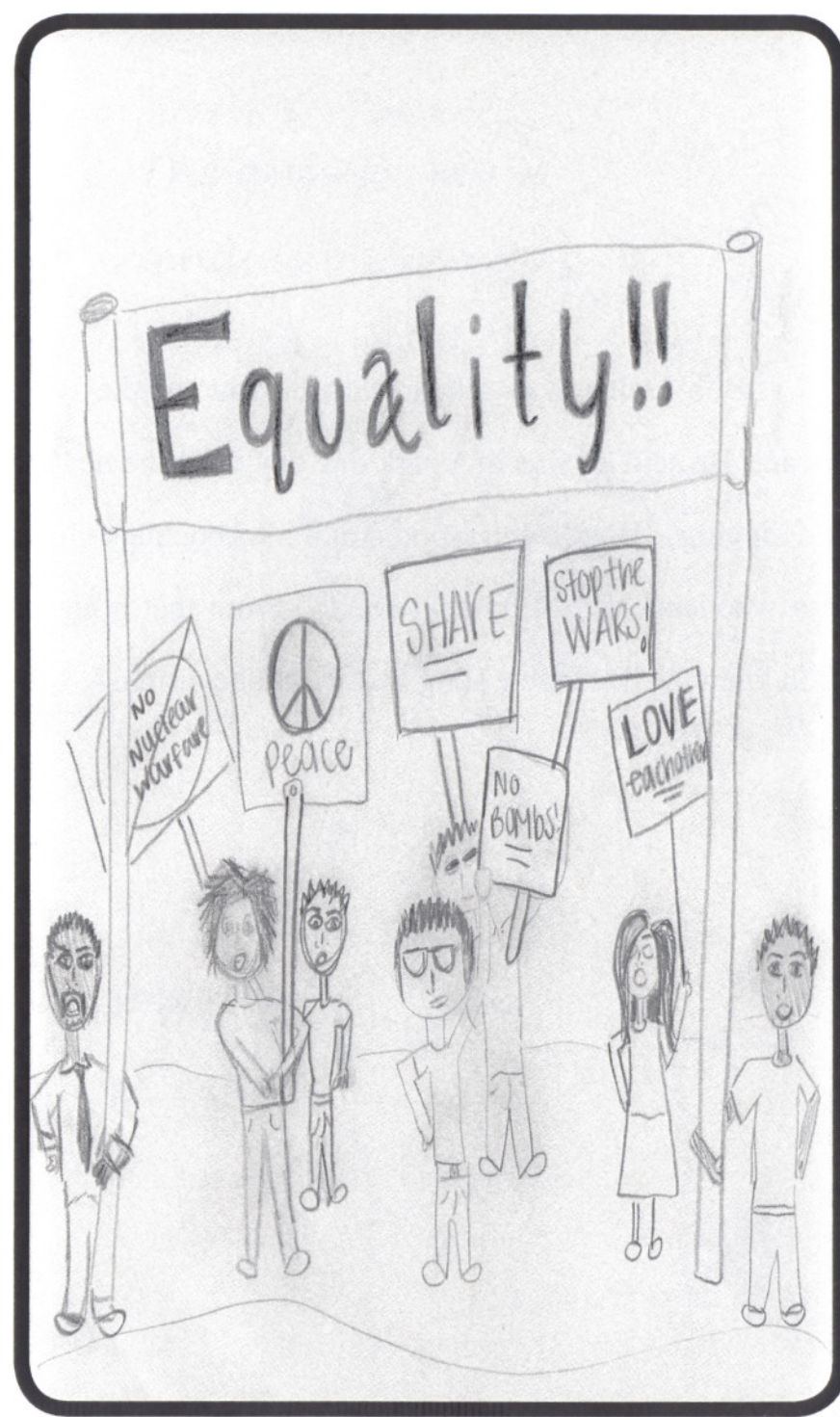


(Shelton, 1986, p. 60)

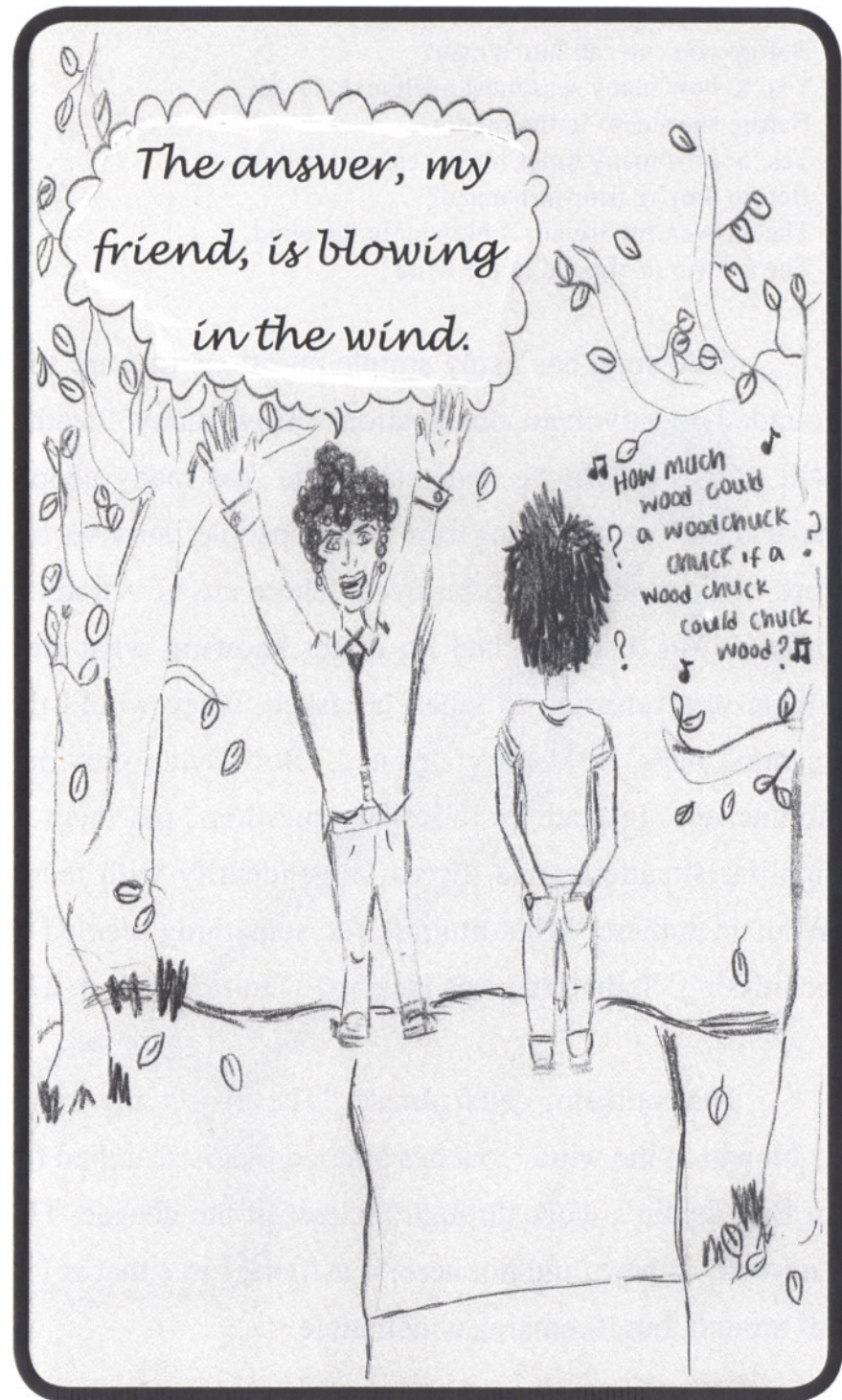
“The civil rights movement was just beginning at the time ‘Blowin’ In The Wind’ was released. This understated song summed up the passions and questions of the time. Some found it weak because it asked questions and did not give any answers” (Shelton, 1986, p. 155).



The moment that created "Blowin' In The Wind" also created a song mixed with idealism and serious annoyance, as well as, a longing for a bigger answer to the growing questions created by the events of the day--civil rights movement, the nuclear threat, and a bland smugness of the artistic majority. Because of society's disbelief, year zero had been declared on the American left.



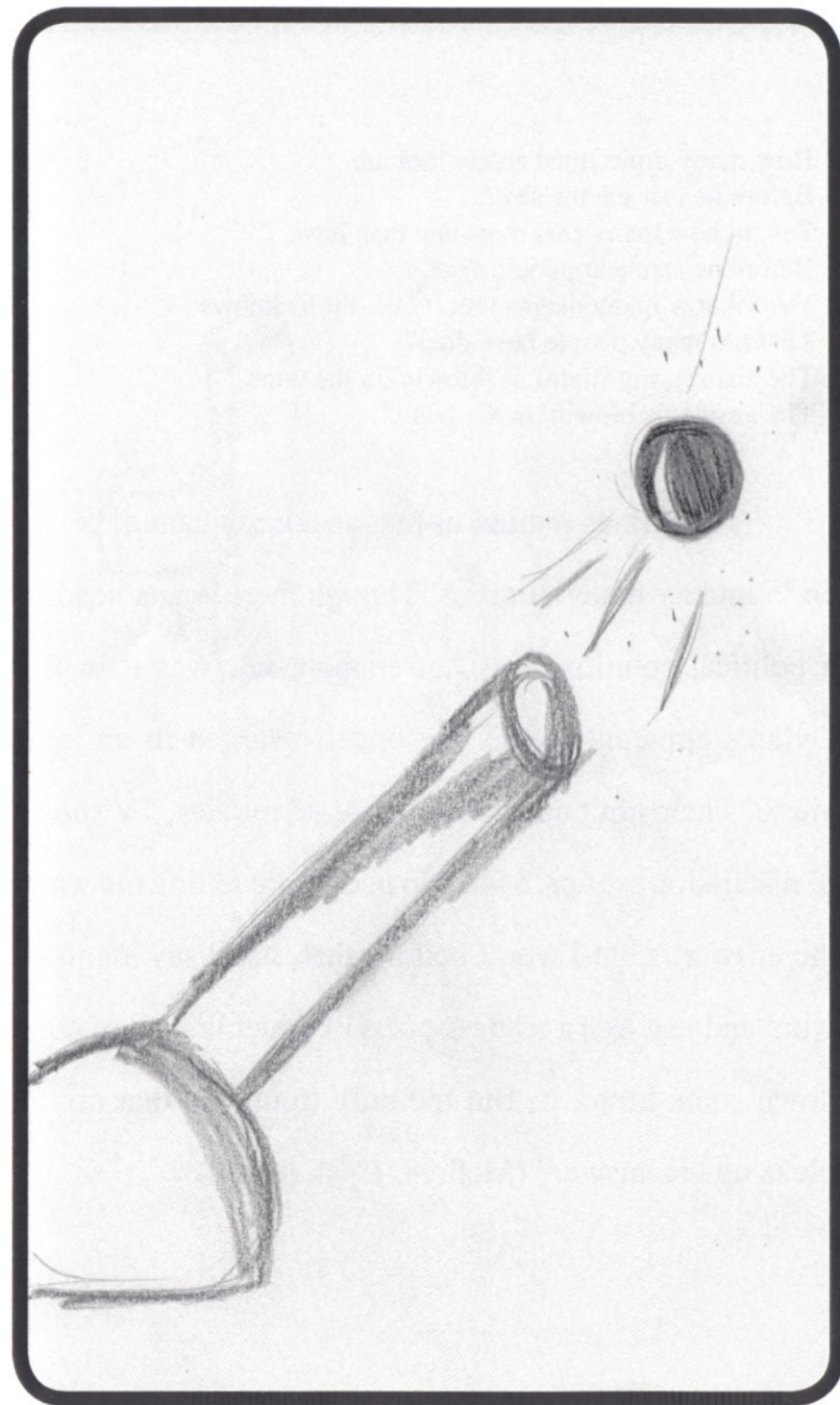
Bob Dylan was asked what blowin' in the wind meant. He said he was in a park one day when he heard a kid singing: "How much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?" From that point on Bob knew he had a new song that would be a smash.



How many roads must a man walk down  
Before you can call him a man?  
Yes 'n' how many seas must a white dove sail  
Before she sleeps in the sand.  
Yes 'n' how many times must a cannon ball fly  
Before they're forever banned?  
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind,  
The answer is blowin' in the wind.

“The song has many simple questions that are surrounded by involved observations: How many ‘deaths’ will it take before we understand that ‘too many people have died,’ or how long can ‘some people’ survive before ‘they’re allowed to be free?’ There are no solutions offered. Yet, listeners had no doubt knowing what Bob Dylan was referring to when he asked, when would the ‘cannon balls’ be ‘forever banned.’ Bob Dylan provided no answers. Instead, he raises the questions, put them to familiar situations, and leaves us to identify with them. What an anthem! What timing! Yet, something seemed to be missing. Something was lacking” (Smith, 2005, p. 27).

The confusing catch phrase, “The answer, my friend is blowin in the wind” touches a mood that is searched for in Bob Dylan’s work through the rest of the decade. The “answer” is here, and not here; it is a real force that is felt all around, but it remains undefinable.





How many times must a man look up  
Before he can see the sky?  
Yes 'n' how many ears must one man have  
Before he can hear people cry?  
Yes 'n' how many deaths will it take till he knows  
That too many people have died?  
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind,  
The answer is blowin' in the wind.

These lines remind us that an answer cannot be given in merely material terms. Though there was a need for a political solution, it is not enough; nor was it in Bob Dylan's apparent theme. He once remarked in an interview, "There ain't no answer in books, movies, TV shows, or discussion groups. Man, hip people are telling me where the answer is but I won't believe that, I still say it's in the wind and just like a restless piece of paper it's got to come down some time . . . But the only trouble is that no one picks up the answer" (Mellers, 1984, p. 130).



How many years can a mountain exist  
Before it's washed to the sea?  
Yes 'n' how many years can some people exist  
Before they're allowed to be free?  
Yes, 'n' how many times can a man turn his head,  
Pretending he just doesn't see?  
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind.  
The answer is blowin' in the wind.

This song seems timeless and naive. But the quick references to the great social challenges of the day such as racism and war carried a powerful punch. “In the line how long would it be before ‘some people are allowed to be free,’ the song was carefully balanced between hope and impatience” (Marqusee, 2002, p. 55). It is filled with a sense that a long-awaited change is both coming and madly out of reach. “When Bob Dylan referred to ‘can a man turn his head’ he was referring to the blind and drunken political figures that were ‘Pretending he just can’t see.’ Now is the time, not tomorrow, to undertake injustice” (Marqusee, 2002, p. 220).



By Labor Day 1963, Bob Dylan was America's leading protest singer. He was crowned king of the American Protest songs.



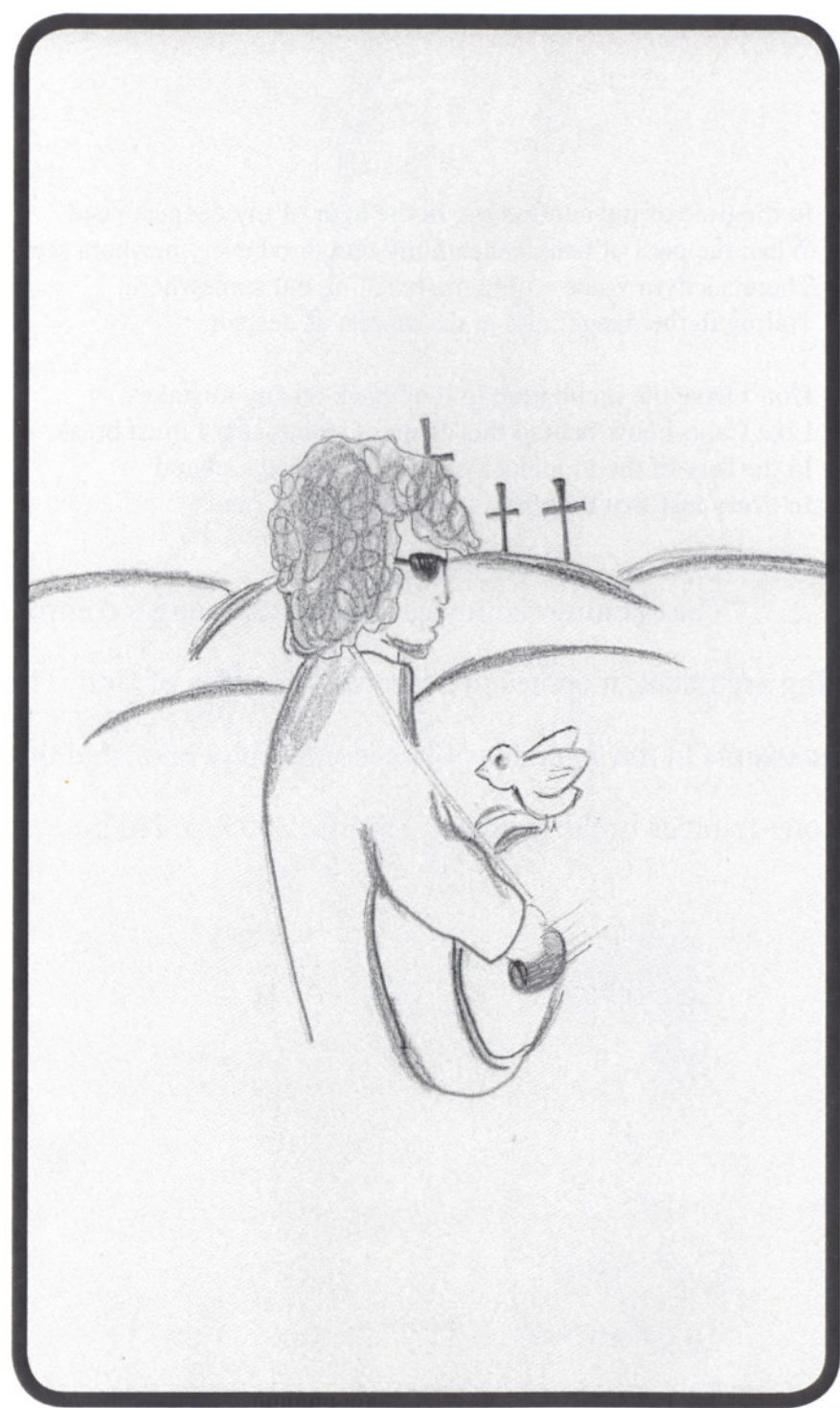
**1981**

“Every Grain of Sand” presented a spiritual solution for Bob Dylan. For the first time in his career, after becoming saved, he became an advocate for a cause. He publicly carried his message of salvation to the world. He stood before disbelievers and stated the Lord’s case just like he stood in the 1960s. This was not a phase Bob Dylan was passing through, it was a mission he publicly accepted.

“‘Every Grain of Sand’ is a remarkable song about the surprises of creation and all its unlimited joys and mysteries. The song creates a compassion that says much about the crucial moments in Bob Dylan’s life and work. However, this particular time in his life may have been one of the most, if not the most, persuasive” (Smith, 2005, p. 287).



Bob Dylan's work in the late 1970s and 80s was dominated by his becoming a born-again Christian. In 1980, he refused to play secular music and delivered small sermons on stage. Some fans and fellow artist did not believe in Bob Dylan's conversion. He had not "sold out" totally to born-again Christianity but had changed focus. He used the same intensity and passion writing his new songs as he did writing his protest songs. Bob Dylan was actually having an inter struggle within himself about performing his early music. He later came to terms and began introducing his older songs back into his performances.



In the time of my confession, in the hour of my deepest need  
When the pool of tears beneath my feet flood every newborn seed  
There's a dyin voice within me reaching out somewhere,  
Toiling in the danger and in the morals of despair.

Don't have the inclination to look back on any mistakes,  
Like Cain, I now behold this chain of events that I must break.  
In the fury of the moment I can see the Master's hand  
In every leaf that trembles, in every grain of sand.

“The opening section establishes the song’s controlling argument; it comes to peace with his idea of God. The answer is in the splendor of His wonderful works, and this song rejoices in the promise” (Smith, 2005, p. 285).



Oh, the flowers of indulgence and the weeds of yesteryear,  
Like criminals, they have choked the breath of conscious and  
good cheer.

The sun beat down upon the steps of time to light the way  
To ease the pain of idleness and the memory of decay.

I gaze into the doorway of temptation's angry flame  
And every time I pass that way I always hear my name.  
Then onward in my journey I come to understand  
That every hair is numbered like every grain of sand.

“The second and third stanzas work to strengthen the earlier statements. Bob Dylan writes of seeing God’s works in simple things like individual human characteristics and things in nature. He feels a direct connection to those who have traveled before him. He feels the Lord’s presence in empty rooms. He now understands the ‘reality’ of our life and is prepared not only to handle it, but to worship at nature’s altar. This song represents a thrilling moment” (Smith, 2005, p. 287).



I have gone from rags to riches in the sorrow of the night  
In the violence of a summer's dream, in the chill of a wintry light,  
In the bitter dance of loneliness fading into space.  
In the broken mirror of innocence on each forgotten face.

I hear the ancient footsteps like the motion of the sea  
Sometimes I turn, there's someone there, other times it's only me.  
I am hanging in the balance of the reality of man  
Like every sparrow falling, like every grain of sand.

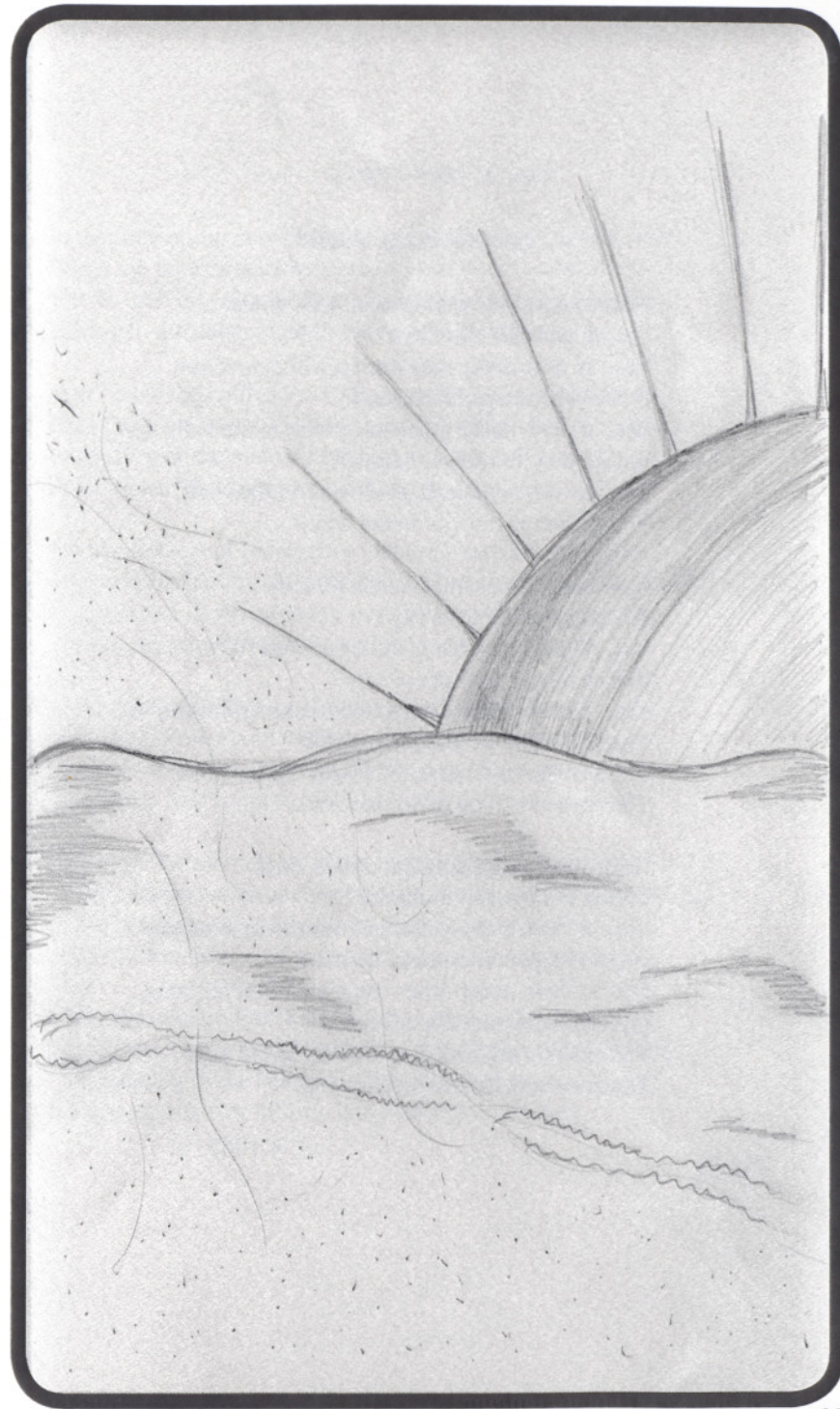
“These stanzas close with as fine a statement as anyone will find anywhere in popular music. With ‘Every Grain of Sand,’ Bob Dylan states his acceptance of his spiritual reality. For salvation, one need only accept the splendor of God’s labors as they look at some of the most ordinary items: grains of sand, leaves on trees, strands of hair. Unlike those who have judged Bob Dylan, he ignores the world that judges him in favor of spiritual acceptance. He knows God is everywhere, he praises Him because of the marvelous wonders He provides” (Smith, 2005, p. 287).





So what is the answer?

The answer is for each of us to decide on our own. The answer my friend, is like every grain of sand blowin' in the wind.



### Blowin' in the Wind

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Pretending he just doesn't see?  
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The answer is blowin' in the wind.

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### Every Grain of Sand

In the time of my confession, in the hour of my deepest need  
When the pool of tears beneath my feet flood every newborn seed  
There's a dyin' voice within me reaching out somewhere,  
Toiling in the danger and in the morals of despair.

Don't have the inclination to look back on any mistake,  
Like Cain, I now behold this chain of events that I must break.  
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