Blowin' in the wind is an album song that rose to instant fame and popular appraisal for its anti-war message. The internationally acclaimed American music composer and the Nobel laureate Bob Dylan has penned this motivational lyric at the age of 21 and included in his album Free Wheeling Bob Dylan ‘which was released in the year in 1963. The song was widely regarded as an anthem of the Civil Rights Movement of America. Though Dylan has said that it was not a protest song, the song has got a wider reception for igniting the flames of protest in the minds of people.

Dylan, the phenomenal music composer might have taken the theme from Wood Guthrie’s autobiography, ‘Bound for Glory’ in which Guthrie compared his political sensibility to the newspapers blowing in the wind of New York city, streets and alleys. Critics also identified that the melody of Blowin in the wind, as an adaptation of the African-American spiritual “No More Auction Block/We shall overcome’. Dylan himself has confessed that Blowin' in the wind has the same feeling of No More Auction Block.

Some of the lines, critics point out that, have got biblical references such as the old testament, Book of Ezekiel(12:1-2). ‘The word of the Lord came to me, Oh, Mortal, you dwell among the rebellious breed. They have eyes to see but see not, ears to hear but hear not’.

The song pauses a handful of rhetoric questions that question the moral fabric and expose the harsh realities of life. The lyricist, while asked about the song candidly outpoured that there is nothing more to say other than the answer is Blowin in the wind like restless pieces of paper But the only trouble is that no one is ready to pick it up when it comes down. He goes eloquent that some of the biggest criminals are those that turn their heads away when they see wrong and know it is wrong. Blowin in the wind marked a huge jump in Dylan’s career. It is inextricably linked with his reputation as a civil libertarian. The song invited a multitude of interpretations. The first line ‘How many roads a man walk down before you call him a man....may be the most vividly interpreted lines. Some attributed experiences, (good and bad) age, passage of time, difficulties, ups and downs, in life to the word ‘road’ while Pope John Paul II gave the most astonishing one. He said, ‘one’. There is only one road for man and it is Christ, who said ‘I am the life’.

During the Vietnam war, young boys were shipped off to the warfront right from their high school classes. This would account to a belief generated there that the transition from boyhood to manhood is marked remarkably well, once they come back rich with enough experience from the battle field to be proudly tagged as ‘man’. It might also refer to the untold miseries, sufferings, the long saga of defeats and victories in the battlefield of life that could make a man complete.

Likewise, in order to enjoy a peaceful stay, at the end of one’s toils, how long one has to wait? How many wars should one encounter to be granted a peaceful rest? There is an allusion to Noah sending out doves to find a safer place to land after the flood. Man symbolises the suffering humanity and dove peace.

Dylan always empathised with the suffering lot. He was totally against war. He was a pure humanitarian at his heart. Wars sow destruction everywhere. History remains a mute witness to all those bloodshed and manhunt that brought apparently nothing other than untold miseries. Dylan forces us to think how many years it would take to ban cannon balls for ever. Cannon balls are but seeds of destruction that would take human lives at a massive rate. When would people crave for peace and say no to cannon balls?
To Dylan, the answers to these questions are blowing in the wind. The wind could be either the wind of changes that blows over every one. It could be the wind of protest blowing everywhere, unnoticed. The answer could definitely be found in the blowing wind, that gently passes each one of us. One needs to be earnest, and patient to get it. The wind carries the answer which means you need persistent efforts to get answered or it may get blown away with the wind. Or else it may be like the wind, unchasable. People are complacent so long as they aren’t directly threatened by insecurities. Hence, people go on pretending that everything is going right everywhere. Unless and until, we, the people stop living in a’ la la land, ‘no answer could be found out.

‘Mountain’ stands for the rigid mind set of the white Americans towards the black. Hard, closed and unmovable and resistant to changes. How many more efforts need to be shouldered upon to melt them into the great sea of change? Or it could be something similar to this stance that those who stand for peace would exist more than those who do not. The huge tidal wave of change would eventually swallow up the warmongers.

 Millions of people were destined to be born as slaves and die as slaves. Many of them have long resigned to their fate. For them, life was getting murkier and they were in utter confusion. Freedom was a blurred concept. They fought in the dark. How long would they have to go on with their sad predicaments before they get a chance to breathe freedom? Who would liberate them from their bondage? Freedom is then a seemingly endless journey. How many more efforts, wars, struggles, revolts and protests do they stage to make them taste the nectar of freedom? How many years it would take a man to be conscious of his brother’s sufferings and wake up from his slumber to really do something fruitful? How long would humanity turn a deaf ear to their recurring cries?

A prolonged war with the deafening atmosphere and smoke shrouded sky blocks one’s vision of blue sky. The war disillusioned many. They hadn’t had any sane reasons to fight for. A clear sky therefore, would most probably hint at the vast expanse of unlimited freedom. Being unable to figure out a clear sky, indicates that they weren’t yet aware that they were being exploited. The untold miseries that dance around us no longer capture our attention. The lyricist wonders how many more ears would we need more so that the pain is reached to everyone. How could humanity be moved to such an extend that it would resort to quick actions?

How many of those deprived should shed more of their blood to convince everyone that human loss is irreconcilable?

The song appeals to the masses for justice and fortitude. It’s a clarion call against all kinds of exploitation and injustices. The song is rich with symbols. Mountain, man, dove sky, sea, cannon balls are but a few of them which speak volumes.