

Pete Seeger - 1988 FHF, Boston
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I'll be speaking some prose later on but I thought I'd sing a few little poems here. Partly I think to put myself at ease. Some of these songs you know perhaps.

How do I know my youth is all spent? My get up and go has got up and went
But in spite of it all I'm able to grin
And think of the places my get up has been.

Old age is golden so I've heard said
But sometimes I wonder as I crawl into bed
With my ears in a drawer, my teeth in a cup
My eyes on the table until I wake up.
As sleep dims my vision I say to myself:
Is there anything else I should lay on the shelf?
But though nations are warring and business is vexed
I'll stick around to see what happens next.

How do I know my youth is all spent? My get up and go has got up and went
But in spite of it all I'm able to grin
And think of the places my get up has been.

When I was young my slippers were red,
I could kick up my heels right over my head.
When I was older my slippers were blue,
But still I could dance the whole night thru.
Now I am older my slippers are black,
I huff to the store and I puff my way back.
But never you laugh; I don't mind at all,
I'd rather be huffing than not puff at all.

How do I know my youth is all spent? My get up and go has got up and went
But in spite of it all I'm able to grin
And think of the places my get up has been.

I get up each morning and dust off my wits
Open the paper and read the obits
If I'm not there I know I'm not dead
So I eat a good breakfast and go back to bed.

How do I know my youth is all spent? My get up and go has got up and went
But in spite of it all I'm able to grin
And think of the places my get up has been.

Three, four thousand years ago, some fellow with a beard and sandals probably put this set of lyrics together. All I did was put a tune to it and added one line, one and half lines.

To everything, turn, turn, turn, There is a season
turn, turn, turn
And a time for every purpose under heaven
A time to be born, a time to die
A time to plant, a time to reap
A time to kill, a time to heal
A time to laugh, a time to weep
To everything, turn, turn, turn,

There is a season turn, turn, turn
And a time for every purpose under heaven
A time to build up, a time to break down
A time to dance, a time to mourn
A time to cast away stones, a time to gather stones together
To everything, turn, turn, turn,

There is a season - turn, turn, turn
And a time for every purpose under heaven
A time of love, a time of hate
A time of war, a time of peace
A time you may embrace, a time to refrain from embracing
To everything, turn, turn, turn,
There is a season - turn, turn, turn
And a time for every purpose under heaven

Some people are singing very well, but I can see, even though I'm not very good at seeing that some people are preserving their academic objectivity.

A time to gain, a time to lose
A time to mend, a time to sow
A time of love, a time of hate
A time of peace, I swear its not to late

To everything, turn, turn, turn,

There is a season - turn, turn, turn
And a time for every purpose under heaven

To everything, turn, turn, turn,

There is a season - turn, turn, turn
And a time for every purpose under heaven

I count myself one of the luckiest musicians in the world, one of the luckiest people in the world. You're quite right I would have been jailed, been in jail, if it hadn't been for the first amendment. In 1955 I was questioned in the House by the American Activities Committee and I didn't cooperate with them and I simply said that these are questions that no American should be forced to answer, especially under the threat of reprisal if you give the wrong answer. And every time they asked me another question I said, "Same answer." So after three-quarters of an hour they said, "We don't consider this a good answer and you may be cited for contempt of Congress." And I think I shrugged. I wasn't trying to be courageous I was just doing what came natural. I feel I had a good upbringing, some wonderful parents and grandparents and even when we disagreed we had a right to argue. I had some good schools and some teachers I went to. So I was very, very lucky that I had my own family who stuck up for me. Then I had friends that helped pay

for the lawyer, about \$15,000, not a frills lawyer, but so much for printing court records and transcripts and everything. It takes a huge amount of money. I didn't know. Justice isn't cheap. And I wasn't acquitted by the appeals court. I was sentenced to a jail for a year - only spent 4 hours behind bars while my lawyer was getting bail money. I learned a folk song when I was there. They handed out a lunch of a bologna sandwich and an apple. And the guy next to me was opening his sandwich and singing "If that judge believes what I say, I'll be leaving for home today." The guy next to him looks at him and says, "Not if he sees you record he wont."

Well I'm very, very lucky. I've been lucky my whole life. My kids never went hungry. And in the little town that I live, a conservative little upstate New York community, 13,000 people. The mayor was head of the local hardware store. I was building a house for myself and for my family, which we lived in (I've lived in all these years) and he said, "Well young feller, I don't know what your opinion is, but it's American you gotta right to your opinion." And I have known that he voted for Goldwater. But he's a real old fashioned conservative. Yes all of us are lucky, every single one of us, and we can thank Thomas Jefferson and Madison for having insisted on putting that first amendment to the Constitution.

I guess you know from the history of the Constitution that this group of rather extraordinary people were mostly wealthy men - slave owners from the south, and merchants from the north. But some of them were scholars like Madison and some of them were philosophers like Franklin. And after arguing bitterly, bitterly, they made compromise after compromise and had checks and balances all though that. They weren't able to get a Bill of Rights written into the Constitution. It couldn't be agreed on. So Madison and Jefferson and some of the others said, "Well we will see what we can do about that." And when it came to the states and had to be ratified, and state after state said "we won't ratify it unless you promise to put a Bill of Rights on it." Right away, within a year, it got the ten amendments. And that first one I guess you could say was the most important one. I guess some judge said that if there's any fixed star in our firmament, it is that first amendment.

(I just kind of did not say the soul of that extraordinary piece of paper, very conservative piece of paper in many ways. It was not a revolutionary document, trying to see if it wouldn't have revolutions again.) [? transcriber does not know where/what this sentence is here for ?].

I've been to countries where they do have censors. I sang in Spain once. I never thought I'd sing in Spain under Francisco Franco. Some people said that it would encourage us if you came over and sang. One censor had to pass over every song that I was going to sing. I had given him the complete words of every song. A different censor passed the words that were going to be printed in the programs. Although they were the same songs, they were different songs because they were printed. The law said a different bureau must be in charge of anything printed. These two censors didn't always agree. I could sing something that couldn't be printed or something could be printed that I couldn't sing. And it was a joke, a terrible joke. A forty-year joke until Franco was gone and they abolished those rules. I went back to Spain a few years later and was able to sing any song I wanted to.

I've sung in about 35 other countries in the world. Never had any experience like that, no matter where I went, never had anybody telling me what to sing. Of course there is always discussion of what to sing, but nobody telling me what to sing. And this is really what I thought I'd talk about because, let's not kid ourselves, I don't think a single one of us would want to see such freedom of expression that our children or we would, actually be in danger. That's a real big hot argument now.

I've censored things. Well I've been an editor. I really don't know where to draw the line between a censor and an editor. I put out books of folk songs and when I came about some of the old folk songs that were very racist, I didn't put them in. And I've even changed a word here or there. You would rarely see Ol' Susanna as it was originally made up, "Eyes guin'd Alabama." He said, "I'm going to Alabama." But the person who really got me onto that was Woody Guthrie. Woody was raised in a racist atmosphere in a small town in Oklahoma. His father once participated in a lynching. But Woody cut loose from his father and went out to California and was singing his little Okly songs on the radio. He was paid \$1 a day, which was pretty good pay in those days. And he sang an old minstrel song, full of that old dialect. And he got a letter

from a black man the next day saying, "Mr. Guthrie, I believe you mean well, or else I wouldn't bother writing, but I wondered if you knew that song you sang (and he identified it) is deeply offensive to me and a lot of others like me." And went into detail why. Well Woody read the man's letter on the air after he received it. He said, "Now folks, I just read you the man's letter. Now I got in my hand that song I sang to you the other day. I want you to listen carefully," [Ripping of a paper].

My guess is we wouldn't be here if in some way we didn't use our power to editorialize. With a three-year old girl, how do you start discussing what rape is to her, at that age? No, you wait a few years. She must learn sooner or later, but you don't introduce to an infant... I got a seven-year old grandson who's part African. Am I going to go into detail about what a lynching is to a seven-year old boy?

I once wrote a letter to the editor. The progressive magazine said, "Don't you realize that all editors are basically censors." You know what A. J. Liebling meant when he wrote that note about the press. He said, "the freedom of the press is for the person who owns it." Oh he didn't go for that at all. He said look, "censorship is something the government does. I'm an editor." He didn't agree with me. But, you remember Justice Holmes' famous line, "freedom of speech doesn't give you the right to shout 'fire' in a crowded theatre." And this world today is full of ever more crowded theatres. What are we going to do?

I think we must try not to be hypocritical. Let's face it, we've got some very hard decisions to make. There are some contradictions we face. We don't want our children to have their lives warped by the wrong kind of information at the wrong time. On the other hand, I don't think frankly a censor is the way to handle it. Frank Zappa, a musician out on the west coast is fervently fighting hard to see that they don't label a phonograph record with the letter R and PG and all that. It's kind of silly anyway. You see the cartoon, the record store owner has got one section full of the R records and over here the PG records, and nobody's over there buying them. All the people are at the other end of the store. He said, "boy, the sales have never been so good!"

We want to see freedom of information. We wouldn't want to see information on how people could unlock our cars when we lock them on the street. That's why I sang "Turn, Turn, Turn" I think what's true or false often depends on when. Let me take a minute or two to tell you about one of the extraordinary achievements in America, which I don't think was widely enough publicized. It was such an extraordinary achievement, I wish it had been in the headlines every single day. For nine months as this group of 500 or more people walked from California to Washington, they called themselves the great peace march. In February 1986, a thousand people had been enticed into this thing by a lot of Hollywood hype, too much. And they walked for a couple weeks and they were on the desert, camped out near Barstow, California when the organization that got them all together went bankrupt. Their support vehicles were taken by the creditors. There they were; camped out in the desert. Five hundred went home saying, "we can't, this is a fiasco, no hope." The other five hundred said, "somehow we are going to make it there." They got on the telephone. Some of them mortgaged their homes or their cars or something, and two weeks later, there they started off.

It wasn't the money that was the horrendous problem. They woke up to the realization that they disagreed more than they could have believed. They had devotedly religious people on this march - Catholics, Protestants, Jews; they had devotedly anti-religious people; they had people that called themselves anarchist; people who called themselves Marxists, and all sorts of people. They had gay lib males and gay lib females; they had families. There was a school for forty kids that followed the whole trip- kindergarten through high school. And the older people were always saying to the younger people, "can't you dress a little more respectably, we're trying to prove that peace is not something to be frightened of, and you walk in there looking like a bunch of kooks." They said, "can't the women wear dresses for example." And the next day a bunch of men walked out, wearing dresses.

They ended up having to have three chow lines- carnivores, veggies, and macrobiotics. They made a number of very important decisions though. One of them was, they said, "lets have a bunch of frequent

elections.” They voted for their governing body and every week or two, they’d have another election in case they changed their minds. Even more important, they said, “lets not use Robert's Rules of Order unless we have to. Let's try and make decisions by consensus. You know that Robert's Rules speeds things up, but we got a lot of time to talk.” And they did. They talked and they walked, and they walked and they talked, for nine months. They weren’t able to make all decisions by consensus, but most of them. But the most important decision they made, “Let's not turn each other off. Let's agree that we never stop listening to each other no matter how mad we get at each other.” You know that one thing was the most important of all because it was hard to break them up. If they had ever gotten so mad they couldn’t talk to each other, then a provocateur could have easily split them up into two or more groups and they never would have gotten to Washington. But they agreed, no matter how mad they got at each other, they would always listen. Curiously enough, one of the most effective things was a young German who, for almost three-quarters of the trip, walked around with a piece of tape on his mouth. He could only eat by putting a straw through his mouth. And they’d say, “Henry what’s that for?” He’d show them a card. “I will not take this tape off until I see at least a hundred people walking together. We are too spread out.” He forced the issue to be discussed. Some people liked to get up early and they would walk. Some would get up later. They were spread out over 10 miles down the road. It didn’t look like a great peace march. Finally after month of arguing, they came to a compromise. They would bunch up in the cities, but they would stay spread out in the country side. And, curiously enough, when they did come into Washington even the transvestites started wearing normal clothes. And I think that, just as they got to Washington, you and I and our families have a chance that our human race will survive, and life on earth will survive if we can work our way out of some of the contradictions.

The biggest contradiction there is now, is really one that I am not supposed to be entitled to talk about. I’m not a scientist, I joke a lot about science. A long time ago people had more time before they had all these labor saving devices. My father though, was an old scholar. The last few years of his life he was almost hyped on this subject. He said, “I’m concerned with value judgments. How do people make value judgments? What’s good and what’s bad? I realize that most scientists insist that science is neutral; science is science. It’s the jobs done with science that could be good or bad.” Most scientist say that its nothing but good to have an ever increasing tower of empirical knowledge. “Ah,” said my father, “if the world were destroyed by the misuse of that knowledge, could you then say it would have been a good thing to be a scientist?” He throws in a loop, “you have no right to ask that question.” Ask it of any body, but don’t ask it of me. He insisted on asking it. And to me its seems like a logical question. “Nothing is this world is good or bad but thinking makes it so.” That’s what Hamlet said to Horatio, and I agree. But we are thinking people. I think everybody has a right to think that science is bad if it puts us in danger of our lives. Einstein himself was supposed to have said “ah, man kind is not ready for it.” Does that mean $E=MC^2$ is bad science? Perhaps. And I tell you how I work it out. I decided that science out of sequence is bad. Now normally in any project, you want to have a sequence of steps. You plan what you want to do, you number the steps you want to take. You assemble the tools. You assemble the materials. You do the job, you test the job is properly done. Now, Thalidomide and Dalcon Copper Shield are two current examples of science out of sequence. They put some on the market without sufficient testing.

Vonnegut, Kurt Vonnegut thinks there is no hope for us because we have too big brains as some of you read in his book, “Galapagos.” But I think that’s like saying there’s no hope because some people are oversexed, or there is no hope because some people are over-vicious and power-hungry. He’s saying there is no hope because people are curious. And I’m convinced that if this world survives, it will be because we faced up to this contradiction. There’s hardly a scientist in the world that would go along with this. Science is neutral. I sent a copy of this to George Wald, the Nobel Prize winning biologist, and he sent me a copy of his paper he had written some years ago. He said, “I used to think I knew the answer to that question.” He implied that now, he’s not sure. He said, “Is science a moral, the changing ethics of science? I happen to be one of those scientists who there is something wrong with napalming peasants, and a few years ago I began to wonder from what base, from what vantage point, may a scientist make moral and political judgments.”

And in a sense that is what I want to talk about today. It is my religion, the holy secular religion of one

scientist. Mankind has been engaged throughout history in a ceaseless struggle to "Know." Science is a systematic attempt to understand all reality. Reality covers a very wide province. Not only such simple things such as stones falling and the structures of atomic nuclei, but more complicated things such as poets writing sonnets and people praying. Some of those more complicated things I doubt science will ever understand.

I used to think a few years ago, and this question is more current now, I'd find myself in a room full of physicists and raise the question, "should one do everything one can?" That seemed to be a very new question then that very few people had seemed to ask. And as soon as you asked it, it seemed as though the answer in most peoples minds was, "yes, of course, do everything you can." The right answer clearly is, of course, not [clear]. Among all the things one can do, one needs make a choice of what it is good to do: those things that satisfy the needs and goals and aspirations of one's society. Who is to make those judgments? One of our most serious troubles now is that we have grown used to having those judgments made the wrong way. We have grown used to having those judgments made almost entirely by the producers of [technology], by those who see a way to make a profit from it, achieve an increase of power through it, or perhaps increase status through it.

Once you've listened carefully to all of those persons, it is of the utmost importance that those decisions cease to be made by the producers and begin to be made by those who will have to live with the products-you and me.

I'd mentioned in my letter to George, "what are you going to do about recombinant DNA?" I don't really like what I've read of Jeremy Rifkin, he seems almost awful, a kind of tunnel vision. And I suspect that we all have tunnel vision whether scientists, housewives, or musicians, but I think he's on to something. What would Hitler do if he knew all about recombinant DNA? Have some scientists work on a bacteria that would kill ever dark skinned person in the world? No. George said, "My wife and I fought hard against recombinant DNA as a technology. It could solve important biological questions that all of us wanted answered, but not in that way. Not by messing up three billion years of evolution. We have three top operators in this field in our department at Harvard, each with his own corporation. Profit making corporation, I'd assume." Harvard had patented a "mouse." The patent covers all that kind of manipulation of all animals.

No doctor can cure a patient unless the patient is willing to admit that they are sick. The first step in solving a problem is admitting there is a problem. And my own little paper said of course it is going to take a lot of time, perhaps hundreds of years, perhaps thousands of years to argue these questions out properly. But what's that compared to 16 million years before the next nemesis planet visits us, or 5 billion years before the sun puts an end to the watery planet. Let's argue about it. Let's argue about it. I believe that only lazy people and bad scientists will shy away from such arguments.

Well I've talked long enough and I thought about maybe stopping. How long have I been going, maybe 25 minutes? I'm going to sing a couple songs, different kinds. I'm going to sing an old hymn, many of you heard it before. Maybe you don't know who. It was written by an old sea captain. Of all things, this sea captain was captain of a slave ship. It was 200 years ago, the man had been a rank and file seaman and he rose through the ranks to become a mate, then become a captain. Now he's a captain and owner, went into the slave trade. The man's name was John Newton. This happened about 100 years ago in the middle of the ocean once, he turned his ship around 180 degrees and took those people back to their homes, went back to England, and became a preacher. And this is one of the many hymns he wrote. Arlo Guthrie told me this story. He said, "that man is a friend of mine today. That was a long time ago but he is a friend of mine because he showed us we can turn the ship around." Now some people sing this hymn faster than I do, but I like to do what is called long meter style, which is an old fashioned southern style of singing. No matter how slow we go, don't stop singing. Just take a new breath and keep on going. No one will know the difference. Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now I'm found,
Was blind but now I see.

Shall I be lofted to the sky
On flowery beds of ease?
While others strive to win the prize
And sail through bloody seas.

We don't have quite enough bases, maybe because that was in too low a key. We're going to raise up a little higher. Let's try that first verse again. Remember there no such thing as a wrong note, as long as you're singing.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now I'm found,
Was blind but now I see.

Incidentally, I had a whole lot of things I was going to say to you, but I didn't get time to say them. I was going to say remember Ben Franklin's great line, "Love your enemies, they teach to you your faults." Remember Rabbi Hillel, not 2000 years ago with three short lines of wisdom, "If I am not for myself, who will be? If I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?" Remember that English philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead. I once saw him give a lecture when I was at Harvard. He said, "One should try not to speak more clearly than one thinks."

This is one I also remember. In 1957 the great Soviet novelist Ingemar Ernberg was in Buenos Aires and a newspaper reported asked him, "Mr. Ernberg how do you account for all the terrible things that went on under Stalin?" This was only a year after Krushchev gave his speech about Stalin. Ernberg said, "Well, we found it was easier to get rid of the capitalists than it was to get rid of the damn fools."

When you think globally and act locally, sometimes very, very local, E.B. White wrote a little poem when he had to go away on a trip and he gave it to his wife.

The spider, dropping down from twig,
Unfolds a plan of her devising,
A thin premeditated rig
To use in rising.

And all that journey down through space,
In cool descent and loyal hearted,
She spins a ladder to the place
From where she started.

Thus I, go forth as spiders do
In spider's web a truth discerning,
Attach one silken thread to you
For my returning.

Before I go, I'm going to sing the most recent song I've been able to put together. The tune I've had for actually almost 25 years. I whistle it mostly, but 25 years ago I learned how to flutter. It's not hard. What you do is pull your tongue back while you flatten your tongue, so the sides of your tongue touch the sides of your lower teeth and the front of your tongue is the back of your front teeth on the bottom. So in affect, your tongue cuts off all of a sudden a little bit of air at the bottom. So instead, of this [whistle] you don't do

like that because that's just bringing the middle of your tongue up to the middle of your mouth, you keep your tongue far away from the roof of your mouth and it becomes broad. Anyway I whistle this tune.

I even had an idea for a music video of this. I sent my idea in to Sesame Street, but they didn't reply. I don't, I don't know. It called for a little roly-poly guy that is really a dancer walking down the street whistling this tune, maybe kicking at a garbage can in rhythm as he goes down. And a kid sitting on a stoop sees him and grins. And the man sticks out his hand and the kid grabs it and then another kid joins him. By the time they get to the end of this little melody, it only takes 34 seconds, I know because I timed it, they grabbed three or four kids there. All of a sudden they come to a little graveyard that you sometimes see in an old city like Boston or Philadelphia or New York. Between two brick buildings, there's a little graveyard and the camera zooms in on a gravestone that says Catherine Von Trumpick, born 1790, died 1795. The kids look at it and suddenly grow serious and the man sings.

Whistling past graveyard is not a foolish thing
When all of the world appears to be coming apart at the seam.
And who can tell for sure what will be next to go.
Did you ever think that Tricky Dick would leave like he did?
Whistling past graveyard I'll keep on whistling.
And if you want you can whistle along
For who knows how many more would like to try the melody
And whistle a similar song.
And whistle a similar song.

And now, the little guy starts down the street again with the kids and they are whistling this tune. They turn a corner and suddenly instead of the city street, the Eiffel Tower is there, and a bunch of French kids come out to join them. They turn a corner and there is a Pagoda there and a bunch of Chinese or Japanese kids come out to join them. They turn the corner and there is the pyramid of Egypt and some Egyptian kids come out to join them. They turn a corner and there's St. Basil's Cathedral and a bunch of Russian kids come out to join them. They turn a corner and there is a Pueblo out in New Mexico and a bunch of Native American kids come out to join them. All of a sudden there is Sugarloaf Mountain in Rio de Janeiro and a bunch of Brazilian kids come out to join. Now there's 50 or 100 kids all gathered around and now they're on the beach. Lorre Wyatt who lives over in North Hampton helped me write this verse. He did most of it.

Whistling by a seashore on a windy day,
Look at the break its trying to drown out my song.
The seagulls laugh as they pass
And the sandcastles all around come tumbling down.
Whistling by the seashore, I'll keep on whistling.
And if you want you can whistle along.
The ocean may be wide but on the other side,
There's lots of people whistling a similar song.

Oh you know what, this is what you do on video. There's a cutaway to a scene in Japan of an elegant women playing the koto. Doo doo doo
And whistling a similar song.

There's a cutaway to a family in Guatemala all playing one marimba. Doo doo doo do.

Whistling a similar song.

Goes to a European symphony orchestra, all in white tie and tails. Doo doo doo doo do.

Whistling a similar song.

Maybe in India where they have those tuned tea cups. Dee dee dee dee de

Whistling a similar song.

Maybe some steel drums, Lord knows what they have. Finally the last time, it's the birds and the trees, you can do this if you cut up the tape with the scissors and do tricks with it. And the birds are all

singing.

Whistling a similar song.

And the last thing you hear is the ocean wave, “phseesh, phseesh.”

Well if anybody wants to try whistling this tune with me, you’re welcome to try it tonight before we go home. You’ll find it’s a lot of fun although people will some times look at you and say, “What you so happy about?” [Whistling] “Phseesh”

One blue sky above us,
One ocean, lapping all our shores.
One earth so green and round,
Who could ask for more?

And because I love you
I'll give it one more try
To show my rainbow race
It's too soon to die.

Some folks want to be like an ostrich;
Bury their heads in the sand
Some hope for plastic dreams
To unclench all those greedy hands.

Some want to take the easy way:
Poisons, bombs! They think we need 'em.
Don't they know you can't kill all the unbelievers.
There's no shortcut to freedom

One blue sky above us,
One ocean, lapping all our shores.
One earth so green and round,
Who could ask for more?

And because I love you
I'll give it one more try.
To show my rainbow race
It's too soon to die.

Go tell, go tell all the little children!
Go tell mothers and fathers, too:
Now's our last chance to learn to share
What's been given to me and you

One blue sky above us,
One ocean, lapping all our shores.
One earth so green and round,
Who could ask for more?

And because I love you
I'll give it one more try
To show my rainbow race
It's too soon to die.

One blue sky above us,
One ocean, lapping all our shores.
One earth so green and round,
Who could ask for more?

Transcribed from the original audio by C. Ridenour, FHF, 22 May 2008