

# Dylan brings God's message to former nonbeliever

By Willy Gissen

I am not a reverend or a pastor, but I feel I have undergone a very significant spiritual journey.

I did not grow up in a very religious home, though my parents made an attempt to teach me the fundamentals of the Jewish faith. I was bar mitzvahed, then given the option of continuing my religious education. I chose to follow my father's atheistic example. My father was a man of science and placed his faith there. Both my parents went to temple twice a year for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur; other than that, they were not involved with religious community.

In 10th grade, due to my aca-

demical success, I was accepted to the Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire. Ironically, my roommate was a born-again Christian. I derided him constantly regarding his beliefs, taunting him with my "scientific" facts on evolution. He remained steadfast in his beliefs. I even took a course on the New Testament and became part of the nonbelieving block in our classroom discussions. Meanwhile, I pursued my academic endeavors, and in December of my senior year was accepted to Harvard University.

With success assured and my academic ambition satisfied, all the problems that I had postponed came to the forefront. My postponed social growth, and es-

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pecially my need for inner growth, led me to attempt to find a shortcut through the use of marijuana. The first time I got high affected me greatly. I remember thinking that there were other realities and that my narrow way of looking at things might be incorrect. I thought maybe there was a God after all. At this point, my religious beliefs were of the "Star Wars" variety: There was a good and dark side to an undefined force.

During this time, I became a big fan of Bob Dylan. I remember hearing him on the radio and was immediately struck by the distinctive and honest tone of his

voice and lyrics. That fall, at Harvard, my burgeoning problem with marijuana and a postponed social life led to depression. I left after one semester. School seemed intolerable, and combined with deep inner loneliness, it was more than I could bear.

I now know that God was working in my life and that he cared and loved me so much that he was about to draw me to him. I recall being at home during a leave of absence from college, when a Bob Dylan song came on the radio. It was "When You Gonna Wake Up." I accepted Jesus into my life right then. If it had not been for a combination of my shaken pride from my crumbled academic career and Bob Dylan being the messenger,

it never would have happened.

I began reading the Bible, and it took me about 2½ years to finish. I was struck by the sheer beauty of the book, as well as the large number of predictions in the Old Testament pointing to Jesus. I was ready to join a church and be baptized. I tied my baptism to a resolution to abandon marijuana and alcohol. I have not had a drink or smoked a joint since then, and that was 1983.

Since then, I have graduated from Harvard and went onto law school for two years. I look forward to what Jesus has in store for me for the remainder of my life on Earth.

Willy Gissen, a White Plains

## To submit a column

We welcome submissions to Forum on Faith. Articles should be no longer than two pages, typed and double spaced. Please send them to Forum on Faith, Gannett Suburban Newspapers, 1 Gannett Drive, White Plains, N.Y. 10604, Attn: Gayle Williams, or fax them to 694-5150. Williams also can be reached at 694-5062 or via e-mail at 75521.202@compuserve.com.

resident, is a member of Harvest Time Assembly of God Church in Greenwich, Conn.