

Give fire to your dreams in the coming new year



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Not long ago a friend gave me a wonderful book by Latin American author Eduardo Galeano titled "Children of the Days: A Calendar of Human History."

You know those books that have an inspirational reading for every day of the year? Well, this is one — but it's not. Galeano is a humanist freethinker whose delightful collection of daily wisdom ranges from historical events in politics and religion to inventions, celebrations and strange events. You can find yourself smiling or even laughing, just before you are shaken to your senses.

The May 15 selection has a title I would call a "brainsticker" (like a bumpersticker for the mind): "May Tomorrow Be More Than Just Another Name for Today." We hear from homeless, jobless youth in Spain marching through the streets in 2011 and their call for justice reverberated around the world. As he says, "the voices of the 'indignant' crossed the borders drawn on maps."

What was their message? "Turn off the TV and turn on the street." "Not too little money, too many crooks." "Markets rule, I didn't vote for them." "They decide for us without us." And: "I'm looking for my rights. Anyone seen them?"

Then these marginalized youth in Spain shout out something that all people of conscience in any land will find stunning: "If they won't let us dream, we won't let them sleep."

Powerful, energizing words. A call to secular and spiritual people — all people — to wake up and take positive action.

"Children of the Days" reminds us we have so much more to learn and much of that learning is remembering — recalling our own history and the countless histories of other people in other nations and times. It should give us a good dose of hope to build our knowledge through consistent, even insistent, education. Insistent like those young Spanish marchers — indignant but not ignorant. We wake

up to realize we are each a child of the days, history is ours to make, and we can contribute something to each day, to each life we touch.

For his Dec. 31 selection, Galeano tells of an ancient Roman cure: Hang the word "Abracadabra" around your neck. He says the word meant, "Give your fire until the last of your days."

Giving our fire is another way of talking about dreams. What is it that kindles our humanity?

Music is one fire we can stoke. "We are made of music," says Galeano. We may have no idea what that means, but music easily crosses borders and perhaps we'll discover neighbors who can teach us new songs, maybe people who are very different, who believe very differently, who have different politics, religions, races, nationalities.

And what if we imagined the unimaginable? What if this was a circle of Republicans and Democrats? Is that so crazy? What if a candle was held by a child in Aleppo, in Mosul, in Moscow, in South Sudan and East Los Angeles? What word would we hang around our necks? Abracadabra ... give your fire!

What lights my candle through darker seasons is to be aware of what Nature is doing, and pay attention. Many of our wild neighbors are hibernating — maybe dreaming — and rejuvenating even below the surface. Just under the roots and rocks, just beyond our view, wild things are resting, recharging for what's ahead. If we can learn from them — from the hidden things around us — and take our cues from the cycle of seasons, we may be more prepared for the fire, the music and the dreams that make our lives worth living.

It might just be true that we won't sleep very well until we assist more people in our world to dream. Our common dream is that tomorrow will not just be another name for yesterday, or today.

How will you give your fire in the New Year?

Chris Highland served as a Protestant minister and Interfaith chaplain for nearly 30 years. He is a teacher, writer and freethinker. Chris and his wife, Carol, a Presbyterian minister, are new to Asheville, but not new to the issues common in all communities. Learn more at chighland.com.

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Fri, Aug 25, 2017