

Singing to Tomatoes by Alanda Greene

I visited the tomato house this morning: a shelter constructed of arched white plumbing rods covered in plastic. It keeps them warm in a mountain area where spring can stay cool until late June and nights stay cool most of the time. Right now the tomatoes are strong and full of large green fruit between deep green abundant leaves. The fruit is just beginning to tinge towards red and I'm excited at the prospect of eating delicious vine-ripened tomatoes, grown from the tiny seeds begun indoors in March.

Every morning I visit the garden and relish what is growing. Today when I step into the tomato house, I feel a sense of welcome. I feel like the tomatoes are as happy to see me as I am to see them. I suddenly feel the urge to stay awhile, hang out with them, communicate and enjoy their presence. I sit down and begin to sing, having the distinct sense they will like it. First I sing The Garden Song, much loved by preschoolers: "Inch by inch, row by row, gonna make this garden grow." I recall good old Pete Seeger who sang it so well. But it wasn't the right song for today so I changed to a bhajan, a devotional song, and the tomatoes liked it, and I liked it. We celebrated the abundance, creativity, productivity and joy of creation.

I have never sung to tomatoes before. Sometimes I sing while pruning or weeding or watering, or hum while staking and twining. But to deliberately sing to the tomatoes, to pick a piece I thought they would like, is a new way for me to be with the garden. It's a keeper.

Many indigenous peoples hold that every plant has its own song. When a healer or shaman has the right to use the song of a particular plant, it is because the plant has given permission. Why is this idea so foreign for most people in our culture? Why can't we hear the songs of plants? Why can't I hear the song of the tomatoes?

It doesn't seem so strange that each plant has its song when I remember that everything is vibration. Modern physics and ancient teachings have moved together in that understanding. Penetrate an atom to its smallest known parts and there are no parts there, just oscillating waves or particles that manifest in form as they vibrate. Sound is vibration. Our ear is tuned to perceive a certain range of vibration and understand it as sound. Humans manufacture instruments that perceive a range of vibration higher and lower than the human ear can perceive and suddenly we can hear the song of distant space, of electrons, of stars.

Everything is vibration. Everything creates sound. Hafiz wrote, "Listen to the music. I am the concert that flows from the mouth of every creature, singing with the myriad chords."

Many indigenous people claim that it is by listening with the heart that our capacity for hearing the song of other beings like plants occurs. What sensitivity has to develop in

order to be receptive, to hear the song emanating from every creature? My own heart sings in the garden, leaps with joy when I meet various plants emerging, blossoming, fruiting or just being. I feel that the tomatoes perceive my affection, that they appreciate my singing to them. I wish I could hear them sing back, or with me. Maybe I do, but it is in a different way from the kids at school who sing with me.

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Modern biological science has developed highly sensitive tools that perceive the continuous movement of living cells, including plant cells; movement that creates a fluctuating rhythm. This knowledge seems to match the insights of indigenous science, these ancient ways of knowing that also perceive the vibration of plants, their song. But they perceive it through other states of consciousness, through the heart's perception rather than the senses we usually employ in the world of matter.

The cells of the heart oscillate also, and all oscillating patterns demonstrate the capacity for entrainment, for their rhythms to synchronise, whether it is the pendulums of clocks or individual cells. When entrained, the rhythm or song of one cell matches that of another. On this day, is it my heart's response to tomatoes that allows me to perceive their song? Is my impulse to sing to the tomatoes because they are singing to me? Are they always singing? Is this the day I perceive the sensitivity and delicateness of their song?

Something today allows me to respond in song to them. Maybe indeed we are singing to each other -they in their tomato song way and me in my human way.