



*Skyline, Summer - 2014*

## Earthlines

By Diane Pendola

### What We Do Not Believe

*"We do not see what we do not believe."* This was announced in a dream I had last night. I remember it this morning on waking to the first full day of summer. The calls of the migrating song-birds are among the first voices I hear as the dawn light of the morning draws my eyes open from the dark hours of sleep.

Among all of the variety of birds flitting and flying among the Pine and Oak canopy around my home lately, I have been watching the many Black-headed Grosbeaks that have made their nests close to the wild plum trees outside our deck and kitchen window. Listening, watching and observing them through binoculars they adeptly straddle— upside down, side-ways and all around— the stems and branches holding the not-yet ripe plums. The adults carry the treasured fruit to their calling young, delivering it from their thick sturdy beaks into the waiting mouths of their fledglings.

In the dream I recall the birds. In the dream I ask myself, *Do I believe the birds have something of value to reveal to me? Do I believe they are a revelatory experience of the Divine?*

I know my attention is absorbed most of the time in conditioned reality. By conditioned reality I mean those places I have been conditioned to attend to since childhood. I attend to my thoughts and my memories. I attend to my plans for the future. I attend to my projects and my emotional life. I attend to the story I tell myself about how I feel, or about what I think about things or other people. I listen to the news on TV, most of it bad. I listen to my human world in habitual ways. I give these objects of my attention the power of reality, because I give them the power of my belief.

Jesus said: *Not even a sparrow falls to the ground without the Divine Father/Mother knowing, tending, receiving...* Do I believe that? Do I believe that my attention can bring me to experience the significance of every life?

On this beautiful summer day in the foothills of the Sierra-Nevada mountains bird-song is everywhere. Everywhere the birds are living their own bird lives among the trees and the border areas between woods and fields. What would it be to allow them to absorb my attention? How would this small shift change my experience? They would draw my conditioned awareness from the thoughts in my mind into direct experience of the present moment.

In those revelatory moments is the wisdom that can show me a healing way for myself and the planet. In this becoming quiet and receptive to the inner depths of “things” there is also the experience of their infinite depths, which implies a journey, don’t you think? An “always more” since infinite means a kind of constant becoming or unveiling. So this deeper listening requires a discipline which is akin to learning a new language. Not only is there the aspiration to enter the mystery of the other, but also the labor. Not only is there the desire to commune but also the dedication to communicate in and through this language which is revelatory of the divine depths of every living subject whether flying, swimming, crawling or walking on this beautiful earth.

So I start here with the Grosbeaks. The males with their bright rust colored breasts, black heads, and striped wings; the females in their subdued tawny and grays, both tending to the constant *whooo-eee* calling of their young.



Female:  
[commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/  
User:Peter\\_Wallack](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/User:Peter_Wallack)



Male: Flickr user [Velo Steve](#) .  
Photo uploaded to commons by  
user [Itshears](#)

I’m reminded of a story I heard once. I don’t know if it is literally true but it is certainly symbolically true. When some of the first Spanish ships appeared on the horizon of the sea outside of the Native lands of South America, the indigenous people could not *see* the ships because they did not believe such a thing could *be*. These floating beings with great sails catching the wind and propelling them ever closer to their shores had no reality for them because the people had no context for understanding them. The ships were outside their collective experience.

I feel, in some ways, how those people must have felt. Eventually they came to believe, and came to see, the impact of those ships on their lives and culture, their past and future. We have many things on our horizon that we cannot see because we do not believe. We do not believe we can destroy the life-systems of the planet earth any more than the indigenous people could believe those foreign ships could destroy their way of life. We do not believe that climate change will destroy some of the most beautiful expressions of life on earth. We do not believe the Polar Bear and the Salmon can go extinct because we cannot see how we might, even now, change that outcome.

The birds outside my window are awakening in me a belief that can show me a way... if I will take on the discipline of learning their sacred language, and inhabit the beauty of their song.

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