Spirituality
Soul Seeing



Pomegranate. (Mike Cooke, used under FreeImages.com/license)



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My earliest memories of the pomegranate transport me to the home of my paternal grandmother, mamá Julia. The bowls of its ruby-like arils would appear before me and my cousins at the table as if by magic, and we would consume them by the spoonful. I marveled at how smooth and candy-like they were, only to bite into them and discover a tartness accompanied by a slight crunch and an earthy aftertaste. I could never seem to stop eating them.

So when my sister-in-law texted me last October that a neighbor had set out a basket of pomegranates in her front yard for people to take as they pleased, I was thrilled. But by the time I got there around midday, my choices were limited. The pomegranates remaining were small, not as bright red as I would have hoped, and the leathery peel was not yet tender. Still, I took a couple home, skeptical of what I would discover inside.

It wasn’t until I was standing over them in my kitchen with a knife in my hand that I realized I had no idea how to peel one. I'd never had to. As I sifted through my childhood memories, it dawned on me that I never really observed mamá Julia open one up; I could only conjure vague images of her with a bowl of water and a knife. She must have worked with ease because I could hear her engaged in whatever conversation was happening around the table. But my mind’s eye couldn’t see her hands in action clearly enough to replicate it for myself.

I attempted to just cut through its crown and down the middle like I would an orange. I immediately recognized my error, one that left my counter looking like the scene of a violent crime. My shirt was stained with purple-blue juice, and my hands were a sticky mess. To approach the second pomegranate, I opted to cut along the ridges of the fruit’s exterior over a bowl of water. But the fruit was not quite ripe enough to let go of its carefully housed arils. The honeycomb-like membrane held each seed tightly as if unwilling to part with them. My attempts to dislodge them from the fruit to the water bowl resulted in frustration and even more stickiness. The few seeds I could salvage after cleaning up my novice attempts were sour and underwhelming. I had murdered the fruits for nothing but stained nail beds.

But pomegranate season had just begun.

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After being intimidated for the rest of the month, I saw some gorgeous pomegranates at the grocery store that I could not ignore. I got one for my Day of the Dead *ofrenda*, where it lived next to the photograph of mamá Julia alongside *cempasúchil* and candles. The other I saved for me. This time, I had a new strategy: I used a paring knife to cut around its crown, revealing the pattern within. I then scored the fruit along the white membrane extending from its center, carefully avoiding cutting too deeply and piercing the arils. With that gentle action, the pomegranate was easy to pull apart into wedges, and the seeds poured out with little effort on my part. It wasn't perfect, but it was an improvement, and I ended up with a cup of arils to enjoy. I finished them in one sitting, letting my inner child revel in delight.

By the time December came around, I was so comfortable with the pomegranates that I took my show on the road. I packed two of them to my friends' house for our New Year's Eve dinner, using them in a side dish and the night's mocktails. One was a little rough on the outside, and the seeds were brown and mushy, perhaps a signal that the end of the season might be near, but the other one was perfect. This time, my hands and the pomegranate worked as one. It was as if it was gifting itself to me, and I accepted the gift with gladness, using my knife with care yet confidence, fully aware of what each finger, each hand was doing. I once again found myself around a table with loved ones enjoying the sweet reward of the pomegranate. Mamá Julia would have been proud.

The last pomegranates of the season came home with me from a grocery outing; beautiful and bountiful parting gifts. Despite of my awareness that they would be the last I get for a while, I don't even remember breaking them open. I must have entered a trance-like meditative state doing the work, not unlike what I witnessed at mamá Julia's table. Suddenly, as if by the same magic of my childhood, I had almost three cups of the sweetest, crunchiest pomegranate seeds–and hoped they would be enough to hold me over until the next season.