
Featuring
Tasha Beeds

Matriarchal MESSAGES

V.3

NATIVE WOMEN'S
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

WATER CARRIERS PROJECT

Written by Hannah Patrie



MATRIARCHAL MESSAGES V.3

There are certain people in life you are destined to meet. In this final and very special edition of MATRIARCHAL MESSAGES, I had the utmost honour of speaking with Tasha Beeds: a Mide-Kwe, Water Walker, teacher, activist, kôhkom, mother, sister, and so much more for so many people. The conversation we had was one I hold dearly to my heart, because beyond the stories and wisdom she passed onto me, her spoken word embodied everything my spirit needed to hear, as an Indigenous woman paving through the red road and standing up for Mother Earth.

Tasha is a one of kind human. She is someone who shares a narrative of hardship like many Indigenous Peoples; however, she stands as an inspiration for how we may prevail beyond colonial-enforced barriers and realise strength, purpose, connection, and healing through our traditional ways which our ancestors intentionally left for us.

This piece is a small fraction of what she shared with me, but I wholeheartedly offer these messages to Indigenous women and girls who desperately need a spark of light in



Tasha
Beeds

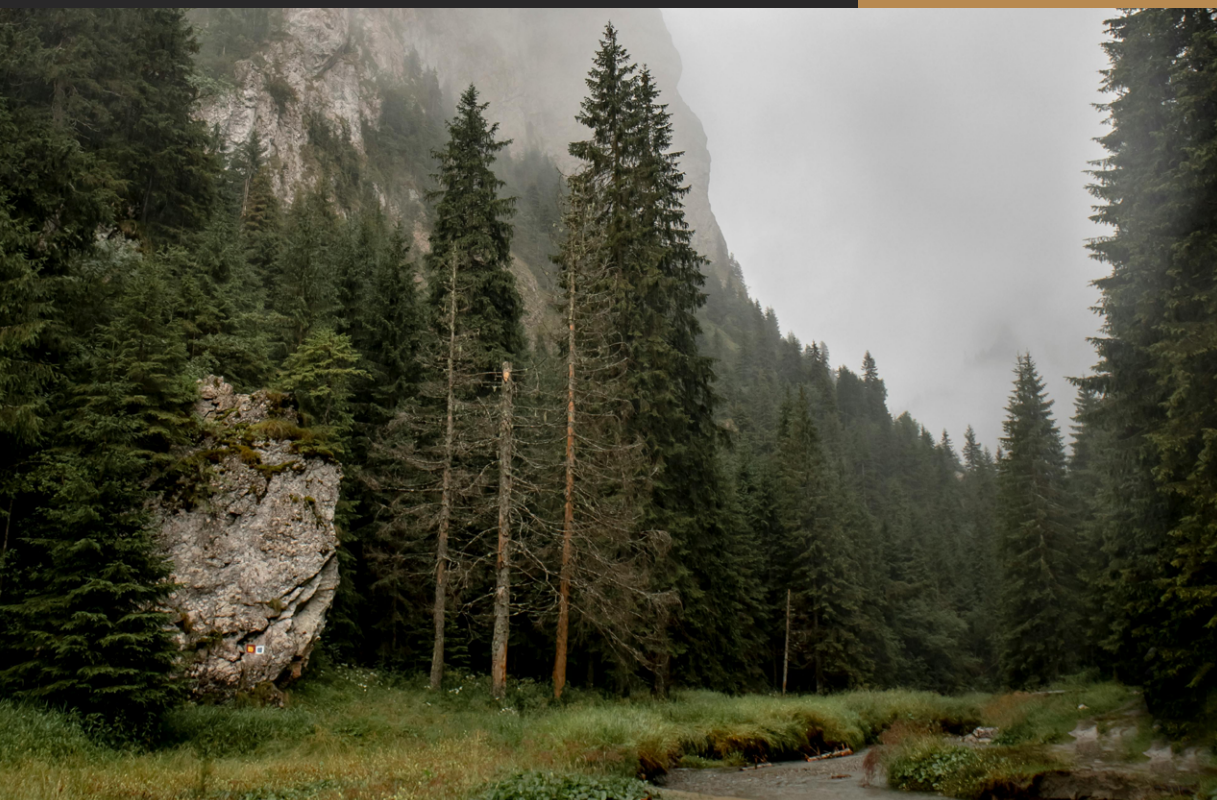
“My English name is Tasha Beeds, and my Cree name is Walking Earth Woman. I’m a Mide-Kwe, member of the Midewin Society. My lodge is known as the Minweyweywigaan Midewin Lodge or the Good Sounding Lodge out of Roseau River First Nations in Manitoba, and with the Wiikwemkoong unceded First Nation in Northern Ontario. So, we have 2 lodges. I’m originally from the Treaty 6 territories of Saskatchewan.”

today's darkness. I know the journey towards climate justice, Indigenous sovereignty, and cultural revitalization can be challenging; especially in environments shadowed by marginalization. But if this piece serves as anything, I hope it reminds you that despite all the obstacles you have faced and may foresee – there is a collective of matriarchs supporting you, both here on earth and in spirit.

Tasha Beeds, Walking Earth Woman. Miigwech. ᑭᑎᑎᑎᑎᑎ. Kinanâskomitin. Thank you for helping me, and so many others return home, for paving a pathway for our future generations, and for carrying the water.

I grew up in a small Metis settlement called Mont Nebo, situated between Mistawasis and Ahtahkakoop. My father was from Barbados, but culturally I was raised with my Nêhiyaw Cree and Metis families in Central Saskatchewan.”

– Tasha Beeds



WALKING THROUGH WORLDS CARRYING ANCESTRAL BUNDLES

 - Tasha Beeds

I'm a water walker. I was trained under the late Josephine Mandamin, she was one of my teachers along with Dr. Shirley Williams and Liz Osawamick. They were all Anishinaabe women who I met when I moved to the territories of the Anishinaabe in southern Ontario, Peterborough region.



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My first water walk was in 2008, and I've walked around the Kawartha Lakes, the Great Lakes twice, a little creek known as Junction Creek in Sudbury, Ontario; and I've walked for the North Saskatchewan River. So, in total, I probably have between 10 to 15 thousand kilometers for the water on my body. That's a big part of who I am, but I'm also a kôhkom. I have a son, 2 grandchildren, and 2 stepdaughters right now. So, they are the center of my life.



WATER WALKS

When I started walking in 2008, it was around the Kawartha Lakes, and it was actually because I had a dream vision about a spiritual being by the name of *Mishibijiw*, the Water panther. Normally we wouldn't share these stories, but I think it's important for young people and for the next generation to pay attention.

Mishibijiw is a water being, so, his home is within the Great Lakes, specifically Lake Superior. He's known by the Anishinaabe as a very powerful entity who is a water protector in his own right.

In this dream vision he came to me and was completely dried up. There was no water on the land. I was so moved by his plea in this dream vision that I wanted to act. I didn't understand how, but I knew I needed to help this entity that was clearly calling out for help and asking me to remind the people of who we are as Indigenous people – as Anishinabek, as Nêhiyaw, as Haudenosaunee, whatever our respective nation is – to remember the obligations and the responsibilities we agreed to at the time of creation. The very next day after I had this experience, there was a knock on the door, and it was my friend who was leading a group of water walkers. At the time, I had no idea what that was, but she explained that when you're walking for the water, it's a ceremony. It's about raising consciousness and the need to protect the water.



*Remember the obligations
and the responsibilities
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of creation*

Water is seen as a living entity, specifically as a feminine entity, because of how we give life as women. We carry life, we become mothers, and subsequently grandmothers. Life is encased in water during those 9 months before we enter into the world through the doorway that is our mother, and that water helps carry us into this physical realm. So, during the water walk, you're acknowledging that relationship that we have as humans to the water. Water is life.



In the Water Walk teachings, it's the women and those who identify as women who carry the water in a copper vessel; and it's the men and those who identify as men who carry the eagle water staff, so there's always balance as is in creation.

My latest water walk was 2021, and I think that was where I most saw and felt the impact of Mother Earth's response. It was so striking. We walked from the glaciers, which are located just outside of Banff, which fed the Saskatchewan River, and goes all the way to Lake Winnipeg - it's a huge aquifer. And as you're walking, your observing creation in an entirely new way. It's very different.



***From the Midewin perspective,
climate change is Mother Earth's
response to us humans.***

One of the things that I noted was how dry it was. It was so dry it was like the land was drinking from the copper vessel we were carrying. I would notice butterflies and all these little insects were following us, and it was because they needed to drink; but the only source of water was our copper vessel.



This older gentleman came out from one of the local First Nations in the Kootenay Plains and he shared how there used to be a wall of tears/water, but that it all dried up and the animals were no longer there. Honestly, it was the eeriest thing because I didn't even hear any birds. But if there's nothing to eat, and if it's so dry that nothing's growing, the animals are going to retreat.

The other thing was we had lots of bears visit us. There were around 7 bears in total and I remember the first time, I literally cried because I saw how skinny they were. One little bear's skin was hanging off of his body because he was starving. There were no berries, no rabbits, no small game; and the fires were also raging. So, the bears would come where the humans were because the humans left all kinds of garbage. They're hungry, so they go through the garbage try to find food. But then they become *problem bears* and are often shot. It is this wicked circle, and we humans are the ones causing it.

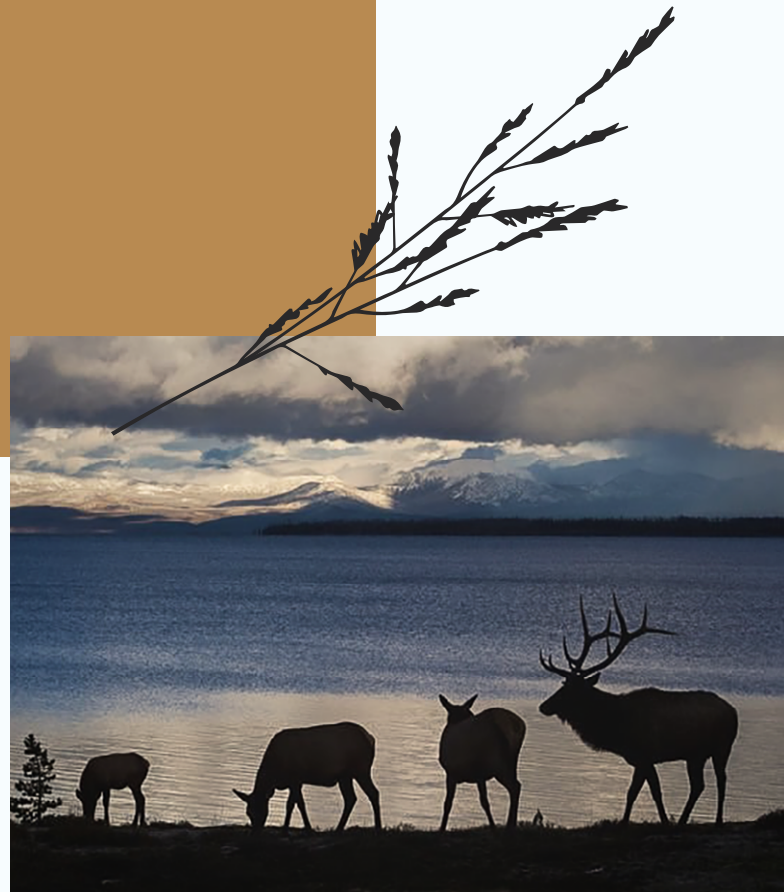
*There were no berries,
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Our respective ancestors have left us absolutely everything we need to survive, no matter what is coming.

I say that, because I've seen it. If you look around, we wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for those tools. We're still using our languages. We're still singing our songs. We're still practicing our ceremonies. We have our traditions, whether it be the Midewiwin, the Sun Dance, the Long House, the Rain Dance, or the Potlatch. We still have different ceremonies and ways of connecting to the land, the water, and the rest of creation in our respective Indigenous nations. The fact that we still have all those things is proof that we can survive despite all the attempts to eradicate us. We are still here.

We have to protect those traditions, because they are so incredibly powerful. They are so powerful that there were concentrated efforts to destroy them over and over again. There is something we have that I think holds the key to our collective survival as humans; and part of that is simply because we have existed in this land and with these waters since time immemorial. If you're of Indigenous ancestry from Turtle Island, and your ancestors have been here for thousands of years, that in and of itself creates a relationship and a connection that can't be broken.



It's up to us as individuals to recreate those relationships, to renew them, to strengthen them. And not just with each other as humans, we also have to learn how to have healthy relationships with the land, the waters, the animals, the birds, the swimmers, the flyers, the two-legged, the four-legged, the trees... we have to remember how to relate to creation. That's key to our survival.

HELPERS TO CREATION

Be willing to do the work. Let's say you meet an elder, and you really admire them, and you're wanting to work with them: you can't just take, take, take. Think about,

- What do I have to give?
- What can I give to that community?
- What kind of helper can I be?

Our role is always as a helper - to the spirit, to community, to grandmothers, grandfathers, and elders.

Get to know yourself through the lens of your ancestors because through their lens you are an absolute, beautiful spirit. So,

- What does your spirit truly need?
- Does it need to be with a completely different crowd of people?
- Does it need to be on the land at the water's edge?
- What is it that your spirit is telling you?

Learn to listen.



Our role is always as a helper - to the spirit, to community, to grandmothers, grandfathers, and elders.

It doesn't matter where you are. You can be in the heart of New York city, Toronto, Vancouver, or Edmonton, it doesn't matter. You're still existing within an Indigenous territory. So, introduce yourself to that land. Remember, if you're not in your own traditional territory as an Indigenous person, you are a guest in someone else's traditional territory. So, learn to become a helper... If I'm in Cree territory, I will try to use Cree to the best of my abilities. If I'm in Anishinaabe territory, I will use Anishinaabe. Wherever you're making your home, do your best to relate to the people whose ancestral lands those are. Learn about what your responsibilities are to live in that territory, even as another Indigenous person.

**So, what does it mean
to be a good guest?**



TO OUR RECONNECTING KIN

You are worthy. You're Anishinaabe. You're Haudenosaunee. You're Dene. You're Inuit. Whoever your ancestors are, they are inside of you. There's nothing that can change that. It doesn't matter how disconnected you feel. Your ancestors will come when you call. They are waiting for you, and I can honestly tell you they will be so happy when you feel deep down in yourself that you are worthy. Think of all that they went through so that you could exist in this moment in time, right now. They need you to put aside all those feelings that often come from the outside colonial world. The way that the world is going, I'm telling you, we need you. **We desperately need you; and so, whatever it takes for you to find your way home, there will be a place for you.**

Keep knocking on doors. Keep offering your tobacco, your berries, whatever is in your respective tradition. You'll be answered, I have no doubt.

It doesn't matter if you have never stepped foot on a reserve, or you've grown up your whole life on a reserve and never stepped foot in the city...We have so many diverse experiences, but our commonality is we belong here. **The land, the water, the animals, the rest of creation is relying upon us to remember who we are.**

► Liz Osawamick and Tasha Beeds

Every choice ripples out, and sometimes we may not even see how far reaching, or what the implications of our choices are, whether that's on the human-to-human level or the human-to-creation level.



TO THE NEXT GENERATION

I have complete and utter faith in the next generations because you have this brilliant legacy that you can tap into, and you're also creating your own legacies. You have everything you need, even though it doesn't feel like it, sometimes. You have heart, you have drive, you have power, you have courage, you have strength. You have all of those things inside of you, and it's just a matter of knowing how to open them up.

The way our ancestors survived absolutely everything, I think we too will have the same strength, perseverance, resiliency, and power that they had, because they're inside of us. They're with us. They're not going to abandon us ever.



Once you begin to relate to the world through the lens of our ancestors, it changes everything. So, find the places where you can learn how to relate to the world through the lens of our ancestors, and everything will change for you.



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