

## **Metis Relationality of Lii Lway di la Tayr through the Teachings of Interconnectedness and Balance**

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The smell of smouldering ash, simmering stew, and sweet Medicines constantly filled the air all around me as a child. I was fortunate to grow up with a strong familial connection to the Land, so my understanding and relationality to lii lway di la tayr is quite strong. As a little one, my favourite snack was always fresh saskatoons picked right from the bush surrounding the Land of my grandparents.

### ***Our Home***

My grandparents built their house from the ground up. My mom told me stories about having to sleep in a tent at night while the house was being built during the day. They built a home, a successful farm, and eventually a mini-Metis history museum, plus so much more. I spent my summers growing up on the Land. Hiding and running through li traamb, the white poplar, with my cousins. Exploring the snowy fields upon snowshoes. Pretending we were little waposh, rabbits, racing one another. I remember the big bunches of sage hanging all around my Memere's kitchen. I loved harvesting willow branches with my mom so we could make dreamcatchers. In the early mornings of the summer, my cousins and I would walk around and pick bunches of wildflowers. Tasting the dew on the blades of grass for fun. We would surprise our Memere with colourful bouquets. From a young age, we were taught about the importance of tobacco, sage, cedar, sweetgrass, and so many more Medicines such as labrador tea and kinnikinnick. I had spent all of my holidays and celebrated my biggest achievements there.

The Land my grandparents built their home upon was a meeting ground. It was filled with history and new beginnings. I could easily navigate through the Land surrounding us. I could tell you where the leeches would appear each spring. The giant rock on which my cousins and I found a sleeping bear once before. I could tell you which area was the best to find morel mushrooms in the spring and sage in the late summer. Sadly, as my grandparents grew much older, they had to sell their farm. To us, however, it was much more than that. It was the Land I once stamped my little feet upon. The home my family and I loved and cherished. I felt some sort of grief with the selling of their Land. I had to say goodbye to a part of our family, our history, and a part of me. My eldest child spent the earliest part of his childhood on the same Land. I remember the first time he walked down the path I once walked at the same age.

I remember his fourth winter and the snow forts we built with the newest generation of cousins. The memories are endless. Once it was time to say goodbye, I took in the trees around me one last time. During this moment, I was pregnant with my youngest child. I was deeply saddened by the thought that he would not have the same opportunities to grow on the Land as I, and his older brother, once had. As I have built a deeper understanding of the complexities of *lii lway di la tayr*, I have learned that it was memories I was grieving, not the Land. I still have my connection to it. The Land is much more than just my grandparents' farm. Although we said our final goodbyes, I will never forget the memories I hold, the teachings I have received, and the taste of the sweetest saskatoon berries I have ever had. These memories are held in my heart.

### *Teachings of Interconnectedness*

After my grandparents sold their farm, I began to learn that my connection to the Land was more than the property my family had owned. My understanding of Métis relationality and kinship to the Land is that it has always been a big part of our identity, our dreams, and our way of navigating life. We see this through the teachings that the Land provides us. On my journey, I have learned that the teachings of interconnectedness, balance, and kinship are deeply rooted within the relationship we have with the Land and their connections. The Land is so much more than the geology of the Earth below us. The Land includes the water, the sky, cosmologies and celestial beings, and weather and climate patterns. The Land includes all those who thrive on *lii lway di la tayr*: humans, animals, plants, Medicines, fungi, rocks and minerals, and our Ancestors' spirits. The interconnectedness of the Land is intricate. Land is seen to be “an animate and spiritual being constantly in flux.” (Styres, Haig-Brown, & Blimkie, 2013, p. 37) Through oral tradition and observations I've made growing up on the Land, I have witnessed that interconnectedness is the connection we have to the Land, to each other, and to ourselves. From our Ancestors watching over us to the sun that shines down, we are all connected. We are all worthy and deserve to be respected and cared for. Each and all have an important role to play in life. *Lii lway di la tayr* reminds us to take that moment to pause and reflect on our relations and how our actions impact the world and life around us. Our kinship to the Land is important as we greatly depend on it for everything. We depend on the Land for food through our plant and animal relations. We depend on the Land for shelter through natural materials such as wood and stone. We depend on the life-giving force it provides, through water. Water is the best example of the importance of interconnectedness as it is weaved throughout all forms of life as rivers, streams, and oceans. Water is the blood coursing through our veins.

### *Teachings of Balance*

There is just so much we can learn from the Land through interconnectedness, but we can't separate the teaching of interconnectedness from the teaching of balance. I think I may have learned this teaching the hard way along my life journey. Every part of the Land is interconnected, as each part of our bodies are. Our hearts are connected to our bodies. Our bodies are connected to our minds. Our minds are connected to our spirits. And so on and so forth. So, we truly need to ensure we are caring for each aspect of our being. Our four beings, also referred to as our aspects of selves, are intensely interconnected: our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual selves cannot be whole or healthy if even one of these are out of balance. This is because the four aspects of being are interconnected between, and outside, one another. When one part of our being is out of balance, the rest of us soon follows. Balance is keeping ourselves and the world around us in homeostasis while actively practising reciprocity through the knowledge that we are all connected and what energy we put out into the world and our relationships will always impact us. Relationships—whether it's our relationship with self, peers, colleagues, family, romantic partners, spirituality, or the Land—are cyclical, continuous, and all-encompassing, rather than linear, separate, and individualized. The Land encourages us to find balance between these dimensions of our self to foster healthy well-being in our lives.

## *Realization through Medicines*

One way that I have learned to keep my interconnected aspects of being balanced is by turning to Medicines. Medicines are natural healing components that lii lway di la tayr has gifted to us. The use of Medicines in my family was an important aspect of our everyday lives. If there was a cough or back pain, my mom would have a remedy. We used Medicine to smudge ourselves, our belongings, and even our food. We used Medicines for Ceremonies such as Moon Dances or Sweats. Not only the use of Medicines was vital but, how we received it. Following proper and respectful protocol when we harvested Medicine was pivotal. Protocol helped to strengthen and secure our connection to the Land. The words from Asha Frost (2022) rang in my ears as I harvested cedar last fall, “medicine is the vital, healing energy that connects the spirit, mind, and emotional bodies. It is something carried by all living things. It is our connection, our roots, and our life force. When we return to the Medicine within ourselves and all our Relations, we come home”. Medicines not only heal our bodies and minds but also heal the relationship between our spirits and the Land. Medicines taught me that my connection to the Land is more than just my grandparents’ farm. It is a connection that has been cemented through my body, heart, mind, and spirit. The teachings I have received from Medicines were the last piece of the puzzle I needed to know that I still have a connection to lii lway di la tayr.

## *Moving Forward*

As I continue to ponder the intense intricacies of the teachings of interconnectedness and balance, I build upon my already strong foundation of my Métis identity and relation to the Land. My greatest hope is that whoever now lives in my grandparents’ old farm is also enjoying the sweetest saskatoon berries I was honoured to taste. I am excited to explore this new chapter on my journey with both my children and watch the beautiful relationship they also build with lii lway di la tayr.

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## **Biography**

Marika Schalla, Waabishkaanakwadikwe—White Cloud Woman, is a Red River Metis and Anishinaabe award-winning educator, curriculum developer, author, workshop facilitator, and mother of two from Treaty 1 Land. Marika grew up in Winnipeg’s North End and spent most of her childhood in her family’s home community of Saint Laurent, Manitoba. Marika has an inherent passion for Indigenous education, storytelling, and Land-based teachings. Marika has committed her career and education journey to indigenizing our learning spaces.

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