

THE HEALING PRACTICE OF CURANDERISMO

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A *curandero* or *curandera* is a Hispanic person who cures many illnesses that originate from a magical perspective. Curandero literally means “one who heals.” They are considered “the wise ones” of Latin American and Hispanic communities throughout the USA.

Curanderismo is a form of folk healing magic. It is believed that God has given someone the gift (*el don de Dios*) in order to heal. Curanderismo also combines native knowledge and religious beliefs. Most curanderos will call on Catholic Saints for assistance. Often curanderos only use White Magic, if they use magic at all.

There are many tools that are used in Curanderismo: some herbs, limes, and lemons; eggs are very popular; and spices, Holy Water, Saints, Crucifixes, prayers, candles, incense, oils, and divination tools. Contacting spirits, ritual cleansings, and energy work is also used. Not all curanderos use all tools, and some don't use tools at all.

Those who search for the help of a curandero believe he is the only one who can deal with illnesses caused by witchcraft. Some of the illnesses a curandero can cure include:

- *Mal puesto*, which varies from person to person, can be a mental disorder causing the individual to engage in abnormal behavior. Or it can be any health-related illness that won't go away under the treatment of a medical doctor.
- *Mal de ojo*, known in English as Evil Eye, is the casting of negative energy at someone.
- *Susto* is such an altering fright that it has caused health complications and a loss of soul from the body.
- *Empacho* is a varying array of stomach complications.
- *Caida de la mollera* is when a newborn's fontanelle caves in.

The curandero's chief adversary is the Devil and the *brujos* that have made a pact with Satan.

Curanderos are also known to practice any or all of the following:

- *Yerberero*, an herbalist, specializes in herbs and plants and the remedies plants can offer. They are similar to pharmacists.
 - *Partera* is essentially a midwife who attends pregnant women and aides in delivery of babies.
 - *Sobador/Huesero*: a *huesero* is a bone therapist, believed to be able to heal any bone ailment. A *sobador* is similar to a masseur and is trained in using massage.
 - *Shaman* are common in Peruvian cultures. They are known as *Ayahuasca* and take the role of healer and spiritual leader.
- Most curanderos heal three parts of the being: mind, body, and spirit. Those who work this way believe all three need to be in balance to be healthy. If one is not in correct condition, there will be illness. There are three ways or levels of healing:
1. The material level is when the curandero uses his tools and is awake. He may need to touch your physical body or work with an image of you.
 2. In the spiritual level, he practices while in a metaphysical state or trance. There is no need for a physical representation of you.
 3. The mental level includes practice while channeling energy. In this level, there also isn't a need for a physical representation of your being.

Brujos or *hechiceros* (witch doctors) are viewed disparagingly and often believed to be the caster behind any hex suffered.

Within their communities or by those who believe in their gifts, curanderos are often seen as a skilled healer and are respected. Curanderos are trained by others who have walked the path before them. Curanderismo is often passed down through the generations of a family line. Some believe that you can have the *Don* but not the training, and an older curandero will provide those with the gift training and mentoring until the younger one is ready. The mentor will then retire, although most continue a few healings until death. The most skilled and revered healers don't charge for their services. ♦

