

# La Vida Buena y Sana: Curanderas y Curanderos

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*Tomás Atencio*

The practice of folk medicine by Indian and Hispanic herbalists, medicine men and *curanderos* is guided by knowledge and religious beliefs exchanged among practitioners over the course of several centuries. Indians shared their knowledge of native plants such as *coyaye*, *oshá*, *amole*. Hispanics also brought medicinal herbs to the Americas which they shared with their Indian neighbors. Hispanic curanderos refer to herbs with healing properties as *remedios santos*, holy remedies.

Over the centuries, segments of the Indian and Spanish communities merged to create Indo-Hispanic or mestizo culture. *La vida buena y sana* (the good and healthy life) is a concept shared within the Indo-Hispanic community as a whole.

Well-being, health and wholeness are the pathways to plenitude — the body in harmony with its environment, with itself and with others, and with God and His creation. Health is harmony and balance: balance of hot and cold, of joy and sorrow, of giving and receiving. Health is the act of penitence and the acceptance of grace; it is taking from nature to support life replenishing nature's bounty. That is the ideal in the traditional Indo-Hispanic community.

In everyday life, an imbalance of hot and cold may lead to the common cold; interruptions in the conversations between our heart and mind may bring pain to the soul; and violations of the word of honor among men and women

may breed envy, jealousy and hatred. The forces of evil that invade life are the denial of our own transgressions and the rejection of God's grace. A once bountiful nature that no longer yields as it did reflects human's disrespect towards the fountain of our survival. This is the real world of the Indo-Hispano.

Some people are born with the gift to know the roots of disharmony and with the power and the efficacy to restore the balance, that is, to cure. This gift is *virtú*. A person with the gift of *virtú* apprentices with a master and vows not to exploit what is within his or her vision and realm of knowing. The person dedicates his or her gift to the service of others, and in this way becomes a healer — a curandera or curandero. The curanderos' medicines, remedios, include native herbs that are boiled into teas and drunk, or ground into powders and then turned into pastes or penetrating ointments and rubbed on the body with gentle massage. Remedios also may be rituals with burning candles and *santos*, prayers, litanies and dance, and many other kinds of prescriptions as well.

Curanderos and curanderas are born from communities of faith and serve communities of believers that seek fulfillment through *La Vida Buena y Sana*. It is no surprise that curanderos and curanderas benefit those who believe.

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*Tomás Atencio, Ph.D., from Dixon, New Mexico, is a professor of Sociology at the University of New Mexico.*