

# Emita. Healing Hands, Cleansing Hands

## An Unexpected Farewell

By Randy Chung Gonzales (poetry and drawings) and Lucas Nakandacare (story)

Translated by Yesenia Cortés

### SUMMARY

This text is an intimate and moving tribute to Ema, a forest healer whose life was dedicated to the ancestral art of healing through plants and spiritual rituals. Narrated from the personal experience of author Randy Chung Gonzales and written by Lucas Nakandacare, the story reconstructs the relationship between mentor and apprentice, marked by the silent transmission of profound knowledge born from the bond with Pachamama and the spirits that inhabit the forest. Through memories, descriptions of traditional cures—such as the treatment of mal de aire in children—and a sensitive and poetic language, the author portrays Ema's greatness, her humbleness, and her legacy. The text honors the value of Indigenous knowledge and of wise women, guardians of a spiritual medicine often ignored by modernity, and suggests a reflection on the continuity of this knowledge in those who receive it with respect and commitment.

**Keywords:** Indigenous healing, curanderismo, ancestral knowledge, women healers, spiritual rituals, Pachamama, mal de aire, oral transmission of knowledge

### Pachamama

Girl, woman and grandmother  
Wise woman of infinite resistance  
Woman with a deep instinct to give birth and nurture.  
Woman breeder of plants, animals and humans  
Woman mentor who spreads her teachings every second on how to  
Live in harmony among humans and non-humans.  
Woman of great healing spirit.  
Abused woman, desecrated by the devil called “development”  
Resist Pachamama!  
Forgive them because humans  
They don’t know what they’re doing.  
The beginning of the end for your rest has begun  
Human brutality tastes your pain  
Unaware that they themselves are creating their own catastrophic end.

**Figure 1**

Drawing by Randy Chung.

Ema was a forest healer, one of those who grew up surrounded by the plants that inhabited the land where she lived. Since she was a child, she had been taught the healing power of plants and rituals; she knew about the spirits that inhabited the plants and how to speak to them. Her knowledge of curanderismo led people in her village to seek her out for healing, especially parents with sick children, many of whom came after unsuccessful attempts with doctors in neighboring towns. Thus, Ema became known in her village as someone who healed what Western medicine could not see.

Like many of the forest healers, Ema had never left her village and grew up in contact with the plants, learning their secrets passed down by those who keep that knowledge. I know little of her history, but it is common in families of healers for traditions and knowledge to be passed down to children of the same lineage. These are

people who live far from urban environments and have little contact with the culture of big cities. People who, even before the existence of Western medicine, sought cures in nature and discovered that healing lay in plants and in the spiritual dimension that arose from this relationship. This is how Ema grew up, dedicating her life to using the knowledge of plants and her teachers who entrusted her to continue healing the ills of her people.

I met her when she was already 80 years old, right around the time I bought the farm next to her house. Luckily, she was my neighbor. One day I was walking when I saw this woman talking to the plants, as if she were talking to her daughters. I wasn't used to talking to plants, so at first the scene seemed a little odd. When she noticed me, Ema approached and introduced herself. I introduced myself and told her I had just moved to the farm. Soon we were walking through my farm, where Ema introduced me to the plants that already lived there; it was as if she were introducing me to her friends.

She knew how to recognize each one and their ways of healing. Ema was always very generous with me when it came to her knowledge of plants and rituals. I never asked her why she told me so much about the knowledge she had inherited from her family, but I suspect Ema knew of the world's lack of interest in her healing art; she knew that the heirs of the forest were losing their roots along with the curanderismo. The few who believed her were witnesses to her knowledge of plants, especially the parents who brought their sick children without a diagnosis. Thanks to her teaching, I was able to heal some as well.

One type of case Ema often treated was children with “mal de aire”. These were children who were too sensitive, who had many reactions like vomiting, diarrhea, loss of appetite, and their eyes becoming hollow, like skulls. “That happens with children who are very sensitive, a *tunchi*<sup>1</sup> (an evil spirit) takes over the child and causes these reactions. To cure them, you have to call the child, so that their soul returns,” she told me. Ema would pass an egg, a candle, mapacho (*Nicotiana tabacum*), and a piece of newspaper along with a bunch of rue over the child’s body, and while performing the rite, she also said Catholic prayers. She used the instruments to remove the *tunchi* from the child and prayed to bring their soul back. Afterward, she asked the child’s mother to throw everything away and bury it in a ravine, out of sight, so as to avoid the risk of bringing the sick soul back.

When the “mal de aire” was severe, Ema would warm cemetery flower, chicken fat, *Agua Florida*, and thimolina, and rub the warm mixture all over the child’s body. She told me that the perfumes she used were like putting a seal after the cure, to refresh the soul that had just returned after being lost.

With her knowledge and her faith, Ema healed many children. She was a simple woman, and at the same time she wasn’t. She didn’t seek recognition for her practices, nor did she do it for money. She knew that the survival of the knowledge she inherited from the women in her family was the most important thing. Therein lay her greatness: in wanting to be nothing more than an instrument of healing.

One afternoon, I was walking through my garden, looking at the plants Ema had introduced me to, how they changed, and listening to what each one of them was saying. Suddenly, I heard her voice calling me, as if she were right next to me, although that was impossible because her house was far from where I was. I kept walking, and Ema’s voice kept calling me, until I went to her house, following my intuition. As soon as I got to the door, her daughter greeted me, saying that Ema was sick, that she would be leaving soon, and that, even in her sleep, she was calling my name.

When I arrived at her room, Ema was lying down, tired and asleep. I sat down next to her and placed my hand in hers. Ema opened her tired eyes, looked at me, and smiled. In a soft, weak voice, she said she was waiting for me. She closed her eyes and fell asleep again. I said goodbye to Ema and her daughter. A while later, I learned that Ema had passed away.

I never asked her why she chose me to pass on her knowledge, but I believe her intention was to leave it to someone who would protect it and use it for healing. Along that path, I believe people like Ema were sent to me to prepare me.

Even though Ema is no longer in this world we live in, she lives on in other ways: I bring her into every ritual to heal children, when I speak to plants, and in every prayer I say. Ema continues to live on without a name; she lives on as the legacy she left me in the form of healing.

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<sup>1</sup> *Tunchi* is also known in the Amazon as the “mal aire” (evil air) a spiritual illness in which children are energetically possessed by spirits, causing symptoms such as difficulty breathing, diarrhea, vomiting, agitation, and chest pain.



**Figure 2**

Drawing by Randy Chung.

### **Healer woman**

Healer woman.

Iron Woman.

Wise woman with a sensitive heart and deep gaze.

Woman of faultless intuition.

Healer woman with eternal humbleness

And heiress of a heavenly gift.

Healer of the soul and body.

Sister of the sacred plants.

Apprentice and teacher of the spiritual world.

Heal and you will continue to heal until your soul  
may fly to eternal rest.

Infinite thanks,

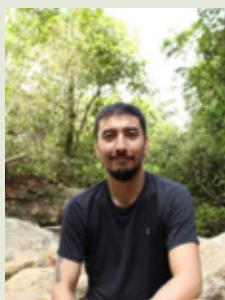
Healer woman.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHORS****Randy Chung Gonzales**

Randy Chung Gonzales was born in Peru. Since 2015, when he underwent his deepest initiation, he has dedicated himself to spiritual rituals, leading ceremonies, and taking master plants, deeply devoting himself to the care of those who seek him. He is the author, along with anthropologist Fédérique Apffel-Marglin, of the book *Iniciación por los espíritus: tratamiento de las enfermedades de la modernidad a través del chamanismo, los psicodélicos y el poder de lo sagrado* (Spirit Initiation: Treating the Diseases of Modernity through Shamanism, Psychedelics, and the Power of the Sacred), in which he narrates his initiation process. He was president of the Sacha Mama association in Lamas, Peru. He founded and directs the Ampikuk *vegetalista* center in the Peruvian jungle and is present in Brazil every month, leading *vegetalista* workshops at LIS. He also works as an artist, exploring the relationship between art and spirituality.

**Lucas Nakandacare**

Lucas Nakandacare, Brazilian, Psychologist, Postgraduate in Clinical Psychology, Therapeutic Companion, and Integrative Practices Therapist. He has been participating in *vegetalista* diets since 2014 and was part of the Ritual Practices team at the LIS Vegetalista Center in Areal, RJ (Brazil), alongside Randy Chung and Karla Perdigão.