



*ENOUGH TO GO AROUND*  
Searching For Hope In Afghanistan, Pakistan & Darfur

Q&A with Author/Photographer  
Chip Duncan

1. Your book takes a dramatic turn from the words and images we often associate with genocide and war zones. What did you find most inspiring about your work in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Darfur?

DUNCAN: The dictionary defines “hope” as the grounds for believing that something good may happen. What I found inspiring in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Darfur was that hope was identifiable in people everywhere I went. It wasn’t something that might happen in the future under certain circumstances, it was happening now, in the moment. In other words, in the midst of war, a devastating earthquake and genocide, something good still existed and that goodness was reason enough to keep going. In a place like Darfur, hope would be meaningless if not for its embodiment – that is, goodness actually manifest in human behavior. How that’s articulated can be as simple as the way a mother cares for her child. Or the way a family with vastly limited resources still finds a way to share what it has with someone in need.

2. In your chapter called “Abraham’s Sandwich” you mention the word “Ayni.” What is Ayni?

DUNCAN: I was in Ethiopia on 9/11 and was working on a film that included the work of the NGO Save the Children. One of their field directors, a man named Abraham Bongassi, taught me the simplest of lessons and it had to do with sharing his sandwich with a stranger. Of course, you’ll have to read the book to get the full story, but when I tried to put his actions into words in English, I found that there was no word for sharing without consciously thinking about sharing. But there is a word for it in Quecha, a South American language associated with the Andean people in Peru and elsewhere. The word is ayni. I’ve worked in Peru on various projects for years and grappled with what the word meant. Then, in one perfect act of generosity more than a continent away, Abraham brought the word to life for me. ayni, to me, means sharing without consciously thinking about sharing. It’s a natural act.

The cover image of a mother and child in Darfur offers a great visual example of Ayni. When I look at the mother’s expression, I see ayni at work. Her love for her child is shown in her face along with the unconscious expression of sharing or giving whatever she has to him – without exception and without condition.

3. Why did you choose Afghanistan, Pakistan and Sudan?

DUNCAN: It’d be great to say I choose them, but the truth is that they choose me. While working on a documentary in 2001, I had a chance to film programming initiatives employed by the humanitarian agencies Save the Children in Ethiopia and C.A.R.E. in Peru. Impressed by their work and the commitment of their field staff, I volunteered to document the humanitarian programming of Save the Children in Afghanistan in 2005. That led to follow up volunteer efforts for Relief International following the 2006 earthquake in Pakistan and, most recently, the work being done by Relief International in Darfur, Sudan. The book and related photography exhibitions evolved as a way to tell the story behind these agencies and their work and, more importantly, to personalize the stories of the people their efforts are designed to serve.

Responding to manmade and natural disaster can only be done with the support of people who are more fortunate and have the capacity for sharing their personal resources. In that sense, I hope the book helps inspire people to find their own way to become involved – whether with donation or volunteer efforts.

4. What can readers in the West learn from the people in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Darfur?

DUNCAN: Many in the West can learn by listening, a character trait not universally practiced when it comes to exploring the truths that exist in the myths and stories of the developing world. Certainly, these three nations, like much of the developing world, have stories and truths to share. In a place like Afghanistan, story and the related truths discovered by the Afghans during the past few thousand years were suppressed by the tyranny of the Taliban and the various colonial powers that came before them. Despite the ongoing conflict, much of which has escalated since my visit, there is a rebirth of art, culture and storytelling taking place in Afghanistan. I believe this re-emergence will help those seeking freedom to overcome extremism and the repression of those who seek to limit human expression.

One example in the book tells the story of a cab driver I had in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. When I approached his car at our hotel, he was listening to a Billy Joel song cranked up on his beat up old car stereo. He was quite proud of the music, which he was playing from a bootleg cassette. It turned out that he'd hidden all of his cassettes in a small box during the entire reign of the Taliban. For him, freedom meant many things – including the right to listen to the music of his choice. When I got out of the car, he said he'd have some hip-hop by the time of my next visit.

5. In the foreword to the book, Jennifer Buffett talks about the way you see the world. The faces you bring to the reader are not those we often see. What's driving you as a photographer?

DUNCAN: There's definitely a place for images that show the tremendous adversity facing the people in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Darfur. It would be hard to find places that do more to challenge the human spirit. My goal in visiting each country was to document the work being done by humanitarian workers from groups like Save the Children and Relief International. Much of the motion footage and many of the still photos I took during my visits do exactly that. But what I found captivating, and in many ways life-affirming and hopeful, were the faces of people whose spirit so often rises above their circumstances.

The book includes the unexpected - the smiling faces of children in refugee camps in Darfur and pictures of fathers and mothers cradling their children, their expressions depicting the same love we feel for our children and families. When was the last time mainstream media in the West showed images of Muslim men smiling or proud? As I see it, it's much harder to create fear around an entire population when we witness their humanity, when we realize that they, too, love their children, when we find that they, too, are good humored, generous and well meaning.

Yes, there are extremists in every country in the world. But the vast majority of us, whether we're Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Christian or simply non-religious, spend the majority of our lives getting by. We work, we play, we grieve, we love, and we try to move in a direction we believe is forward.

6. What challenges do you see for humanitarian groups working in conflict zones like Darfur and Afghanistan?

DUNCAN: The obvious answer is that there are constant threats to personal safety and security in a place like Darfur or Afghanistan. That said, what I witnessed with the aid workers for Save the Children and Relief International was a profound understanding that the dangers to them were no worse than the dangers facing the people they were there to serve.

As an emotion, fear may, at times, play a healthy role in informing the way we choose to navigate the world. It's not irrational to fear a poisonous snake, a bone chilling blizzard or a house fire. But I'm a big believer that how we manage fear makes a huge difference in our own emotional well being and, in a larger sense, in the well being of the planet. For much of the early part of the 21st century, Americans in particular had their head in the sand. We went about our lives with such extraordinary caution and fear that we forgot, literally, that people and families all around the planet share so many values and dreams. We all have more similarities than we have differences.

Translating that to the way an aid worker feels when assigned to work in a crisis zone is simple. They don't deny their own emotions. But they do try to understand the emotions of others and to place their own in a context that helps them do what they do best – providing humanitarian aid. The aid worker is a person who has volunteered to place the needs of others on a par with their own ... or higher than their own. It takes courage to live and work in a place like Afghanistan or Darfur. It takes courage to forego the conveniences and security of western life and to attend to the exigencies of others. It can even be a leap of faith that the rewards of serving may be greater than the rewards we often come to cherish that are related to money or material wealth.

Experience helps aid workers in challenging places because it's through experience that we learn that the world is ultimately not as threatening as we imagine it to be.

Few people are without fear and I am no exception. When I feel fear, I ask myself whether what I'm feeling is any more significant than the person whose livelihood has been destroyed, whose home has been destroyed, whose family has been killed and who now finds themselves relocated to a patch of waterless, featureless desert to live under a plastic tarp? Hardly. We are all in this together and there really is enough to go around.

7. What's next for you in terms of books and photography?

DUNCAN: I've spent more than a decade working annually in the Andean mountains of Peru. In addition to doing extensive photographic work around noted temples such as Machu Picchu, Ollantaytambo, Pisac and Chavin, I've led an annual pilgrimage on the Inca Trail from Ollantaytambo to Machu Picchu. Each trip has been guided by a local shaman (traditional healer) with extensive knowledge of the sacred traditions and rituals of the Inca and various tribes that preceded the Inca.

During the past decade, I've accumulated thousands of images from the Sacred Valley as well as the area around the Cordillera Blanca and the temples of Chavin. I've also spent considerable time with 3 generations of shaman, all of whom have shared their insights into our human past, present and future.

THREE SHAMAN – Images and Ancient Wisdom from the Sacred Valley of Peru will include extensive interviews with three generations of noted shaman from the area around Cuzco as well as history and photographs detailing the sacred sites of Cuzco, Pisac, Ollantaytambo, Machu Picchu, Chavin and various sites accessible only by hiking the Inca Trail.