

Pakistan/Kashmir Earthquake report #4

The earthquake in northern Pakistan, Kashmir, sometimes called 'Occupied Kashmir' by my Indian friends, was incredibly devastating. I have been close to several earthquakes including 36 hours after the 7.9 in Mexico City in 1985. Damage and loss of life are huge.

This quake was unusual in its violence. The villagers told me it felt like every home, every mountain, if you can imagine, was lifted up, shaken and then smashed down. In some areas we hiked through EVERY home was destroyed. The homes are built on almost vertical slopes and made of mud brick, heavy stones and large wooden beams. These were flattened. People inside died but thankfully, many were out in terraced rice fields and on the trails when the quake struck at 8:00 a.m..



The danger did not stop there. The mountains are covered with huge boulders, some in the hundreds on tons. I took photos of huge granite rocks moved several feet and now just teetering a 1000 feet over homes below. A portion of the trail on which we hiked to the peak was destroyed by a landslide before we returned the same day.

The people are of course, traumatized. Their world is dangerous at the best of times but now all their foundations are literally torn away. They have real winters here. Icy rain followed the earthquakes. It had snowed and these people live in makeshift shelters and rocks stacked up to provide some protection. Many relief agencies and governments have helped with tents and steel roofs, but these people in the remote areas have to fend for themselves. It was tough to see kids with runny noses, bare feet and few places to go to get warm.

On a personal note, I really did not think I could make it to the top. There was not enough oxygen for me above 10000 feet. The 'you have exceeded manufacturer's operating limits' kept flashing on the dashboard in my head. I could not get my breathe and my heart rate would not come down. I told the Pathans to take the food and clothes and my camera and take some shots of the distribution. I could not go on. 4 of the 7 Pakistan ministry team had already dropped out, so I did not feel too badly. I did not want them to have to carry 230 pounds of dead meat down the mountain.

The old man, the leader, looked at me like some feeble carbon based life form and kept encouraging me through a translator "its just a little farther.. a little farther' every 45 minutes! They slowed their pace and insisted I be there personally. I sat down to catch my breath again and something startling happened. Two of the younger men came over and motioned me to stay seated. The two of them began to massage my legs from the ankles upward and within a few seconds you could feel the oxygen returning to your head

and heart. In just a few moments I was 100% on my way again. I would like to patent that massage. What a touching act of partnership from these Muslim mountain men.



We distributed brand new clothing and food while we there and the gratitude was palpable. In one of the most touching moments, the same strong old man who had carried my equipment up the mountain, came and hugged me. These are warm, hospitable people and that extra squeeze communicated a deep appreciation that words could not.

It was absolutely clear to me that what these Pakistani Christian's initiated, and that I participated in, had a powerful impact on these people. It was not with words or preaching. They knew we were Christians and were puzzled why we would make such effort to help.

As we hiked many hours down the valley, people from villages 2 mountains away came up to us and asked if we were the people who had helped and given gifts up the mountain?

Imagine! The news of giving these little gifts traveled over the mountains in a few hours. The hope is that the good news of a gift worth infinitely more, will travel just as fast!

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