

– Flood Stress Recovery –

5-Steps that can help you (and others)

heal and move on

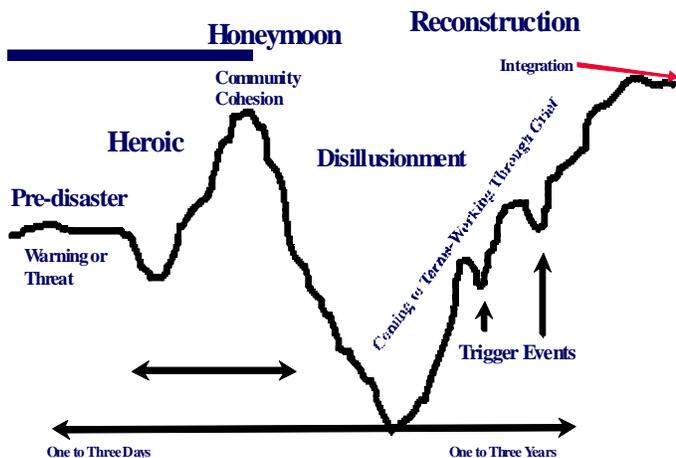
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It is natural for us to extend help in a crisis. It is also natural to get tired, when stress is prolonged. Because of this, recovery from mass disaster tends to follow a very particular pattern.

Typical Phases of a Disaster



Zunin and Meyers were the first to identify how communities go through different stages of healing.

HEROIC: From impact after disaster strikes. Lasts for about one week.

HONEYMOON: Lasts several weeks and there is a sense of the community “pulling together.” In times of mass-disaster, there may be media attention and support from communities around the world.

DISILLUSIONMENT: Stress becomes apparent as we begin to take stock of our losses. This phase can last up to a few years. All the attention from media (and support from the world community) is gone; things take longer, glitches in the system become apparent and or the system fails, and questions are unanswered. Watch out for rumors, frustration, fear and short tempers. This is a time of radical transformation and constant tests of character.

RECONSTRUCTION: Final stage of recovery. Expect an integration of experience, learning, and personal realizations. Recognition of what each person and the community can do to restore the community at large. This can last from one to three years in some communities.

5-Steps to Help Yourself (and Others) Rediscover your Resilient Spirit

It is important to remember that we can connect with our own **resilient spirit** at any stage of the disaster. While working with tsunami survivors in Aceh after the 2004 Boxing Day disaster, I developed and tested the following **protocol for recovery from mass disaster**. Use it to help yourself and others recover. Try it. . . It works!

STEP 1. **Connect with yourself using your Breath.** This ‘*Earth-Breath*’ connects you to your heart-brain to calm, soothe and ground you.

- Place one hand on your upper chest, and another hand on your belly.
- Take a long, slow, deep breath in by counting slowly to four as you inhale. Watch your chest rise.
- Then exhale slowly, to a count of four, and feel your belly go soft.
- Repeat this for at least 2 minutes (12 breaths).

STEP 2. **Assess the degree of Trauma.**

If you experience one of the stress-reactions listed below two or more times in the last week identify it as a “yes”.

1. **Upsetting thoughts or memories** about the event that have come into your mind against your will
2. **Upsetting dreams** about the event.
3. **Acting or feeling** as though the event was happening again.
4. **Feeling upset** by reminders of the event.
5. **Bodily reactions** (such as fast heartbeat, stomach churning, sweatiness, dizziness) when reminded of the event.
6. **Difficulty** falling or staying asleep
7. **Irritability** or outbursts of anger
8. **Difficulty concentrating**
9. **Heightened awareness** of potential dangers to yourself or others
10. **Being jumpy** or being startled at something.

If you have more than *four* of the above symptoms, you are at risk for post traumatic stress (PTSD). When symptoms are reduced to four or less, you can find your resilient spirit and move on with greater ease.

STEP 3. Share Stories and Listen to others with the ears of your heart. This will help you reduce stress and rebuild trust.

~ **Ask:** “What traumatic events have you experienced because of the flood?”

It is especially important to share your feelings—not just report events. What you *feel* you can *heal*. Look at the **Vocabulary of Feelings Table** below to help you identify your feelings as you share your story. This list is not all-inclusive—feel free to add your own feelings if they are not listed.

CENTERED	GLAD	SAD	BAD	MAD	SCARED
Relaxed	Good	Disappointed	Confused	Impatient	Uncertain
Comfortable	Valued	Hurt	Inadequate	Frustrated	Cautious
Peaceful	Respected	Rejected	Overwhelmed	Resentful	Vulnerable
Compassion	Admired	Lonely	Self-Pity	Insulted	Worried
Tender	Motivated	Empty	Criticized/Punished	Angry	Afraid
Loving	Enthusiastic	Lost	Shame/Guilt	Vindictive	Paranoid/Doubt
Grateful	Happy	Abandoned	Worthless	Rage	Panic
Forgiving	Excited	Betrayed	Helpless/Hopeless	Hate	Terrified

When listening to others, be heart-centered. Take slow, deep breaths to release stress and stay grounded.

STEP 4. Engage intuition to create healing, meaning, value and gain insights from your experience. We are creative beings; and insights that create personal value or meaning foster healing. **Ask yourself...**

- *How are your body and mind repairing the injuries sustained from those events?*
- *What positive learning have you gained from this event?*
- *What have you learned about yourself and the human condition from this event?*
- *What have you learned about the Earth and the environment that can add to your healing?*
- *How have you grown from this event? And how will this help you help others?*

STEP 5. Empower yourself (and others). Engage in radical Self-care—take care of yourself spiritually, physically, emotionally, and mentally through the actions you take. Continue to release stress and build trust in your intuition. Apply what you have learned and share it with others, your friends, family, co-workers, community. **Ask~**

- *What have you done in your daily life to help yourself recover?*
- *What have you learned today that has helped?*
- *What can you do now to care for yourself, your community and the environment?*
- *If there were traumatic humanitarian violations, also ask: What justice do you require from society to support your personal healing?*

Become an example of healing, and lead by example, to help others in your community heal and rebuild their lives.



Photo~ Social Work Student with Haiti Earthquake survivor

sharing breathing exercises