

The Disaster Resource Manual

1 Introduction

This manual is a combination of the experiences and knowledge of Brahmins who have expertise in particular areas to do with disaster preparedness and response. Here, we offer guidance in the following areas: understanding disaster and its cultural and social implications, the psychological effects of disaster and how to offer psychological and spiritual support during such times, food and water preparedness, alternative energy, water, sanitation and first aid, plus ways of working with As part of Global Functioning Group 2 (Care and Wellbeing), the Disaster Relief Committee has been established as a way to support Brahmins in preparing for, responding to, and serving during disasters.

The first step has been to create this Disaster Resource Manual.

Objectives

The objective of this manual is to provide guidance and support to the Brahmin community around the world. The hope is that this will be a starting point, and that, as all of you who use the manual will offer suggestion, additions, deletions and alterations so that the manual continues to suit the changing needs of the world and our Brahmin community. We would also like to gather the best practices of Brahmins – both spiritual and physical - and to share these practices with each other as we move forward as a powerful community living through changing times.

This document is a resource for you, for your centres and for those who you may be in contact with. It is very likely that your local government has a manual documenting procedures and offering advice as to what to do in a disaster. It is advisable to use this as a supplement to that, and not as a replacement. Please note that all the recommendations in this draft document are suggestions only. You are in the best position to decide what will work for your location and circumstance.

Specific objectives are:

1. To support Brahmins, and offer guidelines to preparing, responding to and serving in the context of disasters. It is aimed at preparing their inner state to remain stable and able to provide support during disaster situations.
2. To educate Brahmins about the bigger context of disaster and what is expected from us, by the international community as a well established non-governmental organization (NGO).
3. To provide guidelines for psychosocial and spiritual support to help those affected by states of emergency to re-acquire a sense of security and control in their lives, to assimilate and integrate the event, and then to create a new life with a positive outlook and the experience of God's protection.

2 Introduction and context of disasters

Disaster Preparedness and Response

What is a disaster? Disasters are sudden 'events' resulting from a hazard: for example, the hazard of weakened levees in New Orleans, combined with the event of heavy rain and flood waters, caused the disaster that we know as Hurricane Katrina. On one hand these disasters are occurring regularly while we are also witnessing and experiencing the gradual demise of the world's financial, social and environmental systems.

Disaster often presents itself as a single catastrophic event that radically affects people's lives. In fact, a 'disaster' is a combination of factors that occurs when the physical environment meets adversely with vulnerable populations. Disasters are progressive and complex phenomena that result in abrupt and catastrophic events, involving governments, community, individuals and the environment. It is a time when many organizations come together with the aim of relieving as much suffering as possible.

Simply put, a disaster is a calamitous event resulting in loss of life, great human suffering and distress, and large-scale material damage that normally requires outside assistance. Any kind of positive contemplative practice, such as Raja Yoga, is beneficial in building inner capacity, mental, emotional and spiritual resources. Along with our meditation practice, we need to prepare our centres physically, as well as consider ways in which we can be a resource to others in such time.

This resource may be multifaceted, and so we must be as well prepared as possible.

Disaster seriously undermines people's sense of what is true and permanent in life, as well as one's sense of safety, and one's identity. Disaster disrupts the normal ebb and flow of life; roles are challenged and standards of living are drastically altered.

Disasters impact lives in multiple ways.

- physical, (a destroyed home, bodily injury and financial loss)
- social (disrupted relationships, routines and social networks)
- psychological (mental, intellectual and emotional suffering)
- spiritual (challenges to faith, searching for meaning and connection)

Types of disaster

Disasters tend to be divided into two categories, 'natural' and 'man-made'. This definition has changed in recent years. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs uses the terms:

1. Disasters associated with natural hazards: an act of nature, giving rise to a catastrophic situation where normal patterns of everyday life and people become mired in destitution and suffering
2. Complex emergencies: terrorism, toxic waste, pollution, nuclear accidents, crime, war, civil disorder, arson, loss of data, terrorism etc.
3. Frequent disasters associated with natural hazards:

There are six primary characteristic stages in the life-cycle of a disaster, although more commonly people refer to three: Pre-Disaster, Impact and Post-Impact.

The six stages are described below (Faulkner, 2001):

- Faulkner's (2001) Stages
- Fink's (1986) Stages
- Roberts' (1994) Stages

1. Pre-event

Pre-event: where action can be taken to prevent disasters (e.g. growth management planning or plans aimed at mitigating the effects of potential disasters)

2. Prodromal

Prodromal Stage: when it becomes apparent that the crisis is inevitable

3. Emergency Acute Stage: the point of no return when the crisis has hit and damage limitation is the main objective

Emergency phase: when the effects of the disaster have been felt and action has to be taken to rescue people and property

4. Intermediate

Intermediate phase: when the short-term needs of the people must be dealt with—restoring utilities and essential services. The objective being at this point to restore the community to normality as quickly as possible

5. Long-term (recovery). Chronic Stage: clean up, post mortem, self-analysis and healing

Long-term phase: continuation of the previous phase but items that could not be addressed quickly are attended to at this point (repair of damaged infrastructure, correcting environmental problems, counselling victims, reinvestment strategies, debriefings to provide input to revisions of disaster strategies)

6. Resolution: routine restored or new improved state:

Source: Ritchie (2004, p.672) 4 Cultural and Spiritual Considerations Local Culture

Cultural context will affect the way in which the community's various groups perceive the disaster and respond. Do any of the ethnic groups present in the community require special consideration? Consider any class, ethnic, gender, language or educational barriers that affect the way this community is perceiving the disaster. Are there populations that may feel they don't have a voice?

Community Leaders

Who are the leaders within the community? Note the ways in which they have worked through similar events in the past. Draw on their local knowledge and the relationships they share within the community.

Neighbouring Communities

Consider whether neighbouring communities possess resources that can assist at this time, without ignoring the ways in which these neighbouring communities may have been themselves affected by this disaster. Take note of the number of volunteers. Sometimes the volunteers may tax the resources of the affected community.

Economy

Note the key material and personal resources that this community possesses. Consider the way in which the economy of the community is threatened by the disaster. Are large numbers of people unemployed as a result of the disaster?

Spirituality

Spirituality is a broader concept than that of religion or a particular faith. Spirituality is deeper than both religion and culture, although it can be expressed through them. People often belong to a religion or a faith tradition because it provides a source of belonging, meaning, and identity. It is these fundamental assumptive values that may be challenged in situations of disaster.

While there are many definitions of spirituality, it is important to understand the essence of the term in order to offer proper spiritual care to survivors of disaster. Most definitions share common elements that involve the struggle for meaning and the relationship of the human spirit to transcendence and hope. Five interconnected areas that form the soft boundaries of the term 'spirituality' are;

- meaning,
- values,
- transcendence,
- connection and
- becoming.

This is useful when considering how best to support people within our communities, who have been affected by a disaster.

3. Spiritual Dimensions of Disaster

While the areas below focus on community, the same areas need to be considered when caring for individuals.

Community Identity

Ascertain the vision the community has for itself, as distinct from this disaster. Consider ways in which the disaster has threatened, bolstered or altered that vision.

Community History

Establish themes that are prevalent in this community's history. Identify and explore the learning from previous challenges, setbacks and disasters.

Community Response

Observe ways in which courage and altruism are being exhibited and consider ways you can build on this. Note how the community is changing in response to the disaster. Consider events that help people establish meaning such as rituals, ceremonies and anniversaries. Discuss these with your community group.

Community Cohesion

Determine how unified people are within the community. Resolve any feeling of isolation people have earlier rather than later. Have frank discussions with community spiritual leaders on how they feel about handling the demands of disaster recovery. Consider how you support and work with them. Bring past experience and expertise into current discussions.

Religious Beliefs

Consider the predominant religious beliefs in the community, keeping in mind minority religious groups that may need special consideration. Various religious communities may interpret disaster in distinct ways that could influence the care you provide.

Administration

Your work in providing spiritual care may bring to light areas in the community's spiritual life that have assisted during the disaster as well as areas that may benefit from further development and attention. Cooperate with other agencies and organizations that work with allied areas such as anthropologists, social workers and Mental Health Professionals (MHPs). Note, in particular, the demand for spiritual resources, or spiritual support as this is an area that is being researched and needs further validation in order to become part of mainstream discussions in disaster response.

Also, remember that in the event of future disasters, the community relationships and professional networks made now will serve you well at that time. Connections with others and professional conduct are of great value.

Thanks to the National Volunteer Organisations Active in Disaster report 'Link of Life' (Massey, 2006) which was of great value in preparing this document.

Massey, K. R. (2006). *Light Our Way: a guide for spiritual care in times of disaster* (Report). Washington: National Voluntary Organisations Active in Disaster.

RCs Recommendations

Every disaster is unique, cultures differ and local knowledge varies. For this reason, RCs suggest having an open-door policy while empowering the local centres to make decisions as necessary and appropriate for their area and circumstances. This means centres should ideally remain open so that people can attend for meditation, spiritual support and food, according to the centre's resources. The two areas that BKs seem to naturally specialize in post disaster is creating an atmosphere of calmness, peace and belonging which people find beneficial and nurturing, and pure food which gives people a sense of comfort as well as spiritual and physical nourishment.

Sphere Handbook

The Principles below are taken from the Sphere Handbook, which are the internationally accepted guidelines for the Red Cross and other NGOs working in disaster relief. Disaster response is not our area of expertise, yet we are being increasingly called upon to offer spiritual and physical support in times of disaster. Therefore, it is important that we know the minimum standards that NGOs abide by. These are abridged, but the original source can be accessed at

- <http://www.sphereproject.org/>:

Humanitarian Guidelines for Brahma Kumaris Raja Yoga Centres

1 The humanitarian imperative comes first. The right to receive humanitarian assistance, and to offer it, is a fundamental humanitarian principle, which should be enjoyed by all citizens of all countries. As members of the international community, we recognise our obligation to provide humanitarian assistance wherever it is needed. The prime motivation of our response to disaster is to alleviate human suffering amongst those least able to withstand the stress caused by disaster. When we give humanitarian aid it is not a partisan or political act.

2 Aid is given regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipients and without adverse distinction of any kind. Aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone. Human suffering must be alleviated whenever it is found; life is as precious in one part of a country as another. Thus, our provision of aid will reflect the degree of suffering it seeks to alleviate. In implementing this approach, we recognise the crucial role played by women in disaster-prone communities and will ensure that this role is supported, not diminished, by our programmes.

3 Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint. Humanitarian aid will be given according to the need of individuals, families and communities. Notwithstanding the right of NGHAs (Non-Governmental Humanitarian Aid Organizations) to espouse particular political or religious opinions, we affirm that assistance will not be dependent on the adherence of the recipients to those opinions. We will not tie the promise, delivery or distribution of assistance to the embracing or acceptance of a particular political or religious creed.

4 We shall endeavour not to act as instruments of government foreign policy. NGHAs are agencies that act independently from governments. We therefore formulate our own policies and implementation strategies and do not seek to implement the policy of any government. We will use the assistance we receive to respond to needs. We value and promote the voluntary giving of labour and finances by concerned individuals to support our work and recognise the independence of action promoted by such voluntary motivation.

5 We shall respect culture and custom. We will endeavour to respect the culture, structures and customs of the communities and countries we are working in.

6 We shall attempt to build disaster response on local capacities. All people and communities – even in disaster – possess capacities as well as vulnerabilities. Where possible, we will strengthen these capacities by working with local staff, purchasing local materials and cooperating with local companies. Where possible, we will work with local humanitarian organizations as partners in planning and implementation and cooperate with local government structures where appropriate.

7 Ways shall be found to involve programme beneficiaries in the management of relief aid.

8 Disaster response assistance should never be imposed upon the beneficiaries. Effective relief and lasting rehabilitation can best be achieved where the intended beneficiaries are involved in the design, management and implementation of the assistance programme. We will strive to achieve full community participation in our relief and rehabilitation programmes.

8 Relief aid must strive to reduce future vulnerabilities to disaster as well as meeting basic needs. All relief actions affect the prospects for long-term development, either in a positive or a negative fashion. Recognising this, we will strive to implement relief programmes that actively reduce the beneficiaries'

vulnerability to future disasters and help create sustainable lifestyles. We will also pay attention to environmental concerns in the design and management of relief programmes.

9 We hold ourselves accountable to both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept resources. We may act as an institutional link in the partnership between those who wish to assist and those who need assistance during disasters. We therefore hold ourselves accountable to both constituencies. All our dealings with benefactors and beneficiaries shall reflect an attitude of openness and transparency.

We recognise the need to report on our activities, both from a financial perspective and the perspective of effectiveness. We will also seek to report, in an open fashion, upon the impact of our work, and the factors limiting or enhancing that impact. Our programmes will be based upon high standards of professionalism and expertise in order to minimise the wasting of valuable resources.

10 In our information, publicity and advertising activities, we shall recognise disaster victims as dignified humans, not hopeless objects. Respect for the disaster victim as an equal partner in action should never be lost. In our public information we shall portray an objective image of the disaster situation where the capacities and aspirations of disaster victims are highlighted, and not just their vulnerabilities and fears. While we will cooperate with the media in order to enhance public response, we will not allow external or internal demands for publicity to take precedence over the principle of maximising overall relief assistance. We will avoid competing with other disaster response agencies for media coverage in situations where such coverage may be to the detriment of the service provided to the beneficiaries or to the security of our staff or the beneficiaries.

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