

Ten Years after the Great East Japan Earthquake—Natural Disasters and Spiritual Growth, from a Yoga Perspective

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Abstract

In the Great East Japan Earthquake, a large number of areas were destroyed by the tsunami. In addition, there was a loss of houses, familiar hometown scenery, and bereavement of family and friends. The victims are thought to have a complex experience of loss. The purpose of this study is to investigate the mental growth of the victims ten years after the disaster from the perspective of yoga, and to explore the possibility of overcoming various mental problems of victims in the natural disasters that are expected to occur in the future. The yoga therapy which was used to support the victims of the disaster includes the three pillars of yoga: breathing, meditation, and exercises. They helped the victims to develop their ability to control emotions and to look at things and themselves objectively. This study conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 people in their 60s to 80s living in Iwate prefecture, including 10 people who had participated in yoga therapy after the earthquake (group of participants experienced in yoga therapy) and 10 people who had not experienced the yoga therapy (group of participants not experienced in yoga therapy). For the interview items, this study set up large categories based on the items of the PTG. The verbatim transcripts were analyzed by means of text mining to create co-occurrence network diagrams as “the words 10 years after the earthquake”. Further analysis was carried out while reading the verbatim transcripts to clarify the co-occurrence relationship of words. The participants’ responses in both groups were generally positive, because the region is often hit by tsunamis, and the lessons of over-coming many disasters have been handed down from generation to generation. However, the participants not experienced in yoga therapy showed not only compassion and appreciation for others but also negative feelings in their responses. They appear to accept the current situation, yet they also have complicated feelings about the situation. Among the participants experienced in yoga therapy, there were

responses about self-awareness and life in the midst of the unprecedented situation of the earthquake. Some of them said that the influence of the yoga teacher was significant, suggesting that awareness gained through yoga therapy added to the strength that had originally been passed along to them and had an impact on their mental health. It is possible that yoga can help the mental growth of victims of future natural disasters.

Keywords

Yoga, Great East Japan Earthquake, Natural Disasters, Spiritual Growth

1. Introduction

1.1. Natural Disasters and the Japanese People

On the 11th of March, 2011, a trench-type earthquake with a 9.0 magnitude occurred off the coast of Sanriku, striking eastern Japan. The resulting tsunami caused extensive damage on the coastal areas.

A large number of areas were devastated. Eight prefectures (Miyagi, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Iwate, Gunma, Saitama, Chiba) recorded seismic intensity just under 6.0 on the Richter scale, and large tsunamis were observed in many areas. The widespread damage caused by the tsunami had a major impact on human life in the area. There were 19,729 dead (including disaster-related deaths) and 2559 missing (Reconstruction Agency, as of March 1, 2020). In particular, the three prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima suffered great damage. In January 2021, ten years after the Great East Japan Earthquake, the Reconstruction Agency (2021) published a report titled “Current Status and Issues of Reconstruction”: 1) support for disaster victims; 2) reconstruction of homes and towns; 3) revitalization of industries and livelihoods; 4) reconstruction and revitalization of Fukushima. In terms of support for disaster victims, the government is responding to issues that arise during the reconstruction progress. In order to provide support for the new stages of recovery for victims, the following services are provided: support for watching over and providing physical and mental care, support for community building, “psychological recovery” to create a sense of purpose in life, and consultation support for housing and livelihood reconstruction. In light of this trend, it is clear that the recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake is not over yet. Physical and mental health care will continue to be needed. It is known that traumatic reaction survivors seem to experience normal responses to abnormal events. All people who experience disasters, to varying degrees, experience events such as emotional distress, fear, and loss of comfort and a sense of well-being (Underwood, 2005).

The 3.11 “triple disaster” resulted in a combined loss experience that included the destruction of homes in the community and its surrounding environment due to the tsunami and the nuclear power plant accident. This resulted in the deaths of family and friends, personal health problems and occupation and eco-

conomic losses. In particular, the grief of bereaved families is deep and profound, and it becomes more complicated when they are unable to see the body of the deceased, resulting in the need for long-term grief care (Murakami, 2012). Grief is a physical, psychological, and social reaction to the loss of a loved one or object (Takaki, 2007). Murakami (2012) said that because there was time between the earthquake and the tsunami, those who were able to escape were tormented by a sense of remorse and regret (survivor's guilt).

According to Underwood (2005), victims feel guilty whether they did or did not do what they could in the disaster area. We think that the prolonged existence of such a strong stress state causes Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Japan is prone to disasters such as typhoons, heavy rains, snowfalls, floods, landslides, earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions (Cabinet Office, 2020). Japan has 20.8% of the world's earthquakes with a magnitude of 6.0 or greater, 7.0% of the world's active volcanoes, 0.4% of the world's fatalities, and 18.3% of the world's disaster losses, compared to 0.25% of the world's land area (Cabinet Office, 2020).

Japan is long and narrow in the northeast-southwest direction, and the climates, customs, and lifestyles of the people in the northeastern and southwestern parts of the archipelago are very different from each other, except for anthropological characteristics.

Such incidence of natural disasters has perhaps induced a certain sensibility in the Japanese people, a kind of enlightened sensibility, such as a "view of impermanence" and a "view of pessimism". It is a "resignation" to natural phenomenon brought about by the "empirical rule of repeated damage and suffering," and it is also a rational, orderly and a realistic way to deal with natural disasters after they have occurred (Kobayashi, 2019). In this case, "resignation" is a skill necessary for survival, and we consider it to be "acceptance".

Many people have experiences that are traumatic. Their reactions may vary depending on the outcome of the disaster, personal factors, and environmental influences.

1.2. Overcoming Trauma and Growing Spiritually

Kolk et al. (2014) reported through a study of the efficacy of yoga for women with PTSD (USA) suggesting that yoga significantly reduced PTSD symptoms, relieving physical and sensory experiences associated with fear and inability, and increasing the tolerance of emotional consciousness.

In the case of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the brain does not understand that the threat is over, and the body continues to react as if it is still exposed to danger. Yoga is very effective in helping the body feel safe. Yoga has three core pillars: breathing exercises, meditation, and poses. In order to regulate oneself, there is the function of the brainstem, which is the core of self-control. Within it, there is the sympathetic nervous system, which works to move the body and the parasympathetic nervous system, which is related to the regulation of the body, such as digestion and heartbeat. Slow pranayama focuses on the ex-

hale. It stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system and calms the body. Pranayama changes the rate of breathing, but one way to increase heart rate variability is to slow down and deepen the breathing. And it suggested that the more we meditate, the more we become aware of our inner world, and the more we repeat it, the more our sense of inner acceptance grows. By cultivating mindfulness, we can activate the part of the brain that regulates our emotional responses. When the body is in a traumatic state, the outer nucleus of the amygdala is stimulated, but the body cannot move. When the body is stuck, panic and helplessness set in, but asana, a yoga pose, is necessary and allows one to feel that their body is their own (Kolk, 2013).

Yoshida (2018) reported that participants in the holistic healthy living promotion program using yoga therapy showed post-traumatic growth (PTG), such as being able to maintain mental stability through breathing exercises, making an effort to keep their strength, and trying to figure out what their purpose is and how to live it. Such hardship experienced during the Great East Japan Earthquake was very useful in being able to help themselves and others during the subsequent Kumamoto earthquake.

PTG: Post Traumatic Growth appears beyond the symptoms caused by experiencing a traumatic reaction. There are: 1) relationships with others, 2) new possibilities, 3) strength as a human being, 4) spiritual transformation, and 5) gratitude for life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995).

Yoshida also reported that one participant talked about the deepest parts of their heart and many other deep things that they had never previously disclosed to anyone, which would mean that they were able to disclose their thoughts as a result of yoga therapy. On the other hand, the group that did not undertake the program cited inconvenience, difficulty, and not being able to do things alone. Yoshida's hypothesis is that a group that has grown a little before a traumatic event will be depressed when such an event occurs, but will quickly recover and grow to a higher level than their previous state. It was also suggested that yoga has a significant contribution to the ability to control emotions, to look at things objectively and to change the way we perceive ourselves.

Originally, yoga contained wisdom about self-awareness, self-control, and health actualization. "Yoga therapy" is a therapy that extracts and refines the wisdom and techniques necessary to achieve physical and mental well-being. In recent years, it is recognized as an integrative medicine in Europe, the United States and Japan. Its health-promoting effects have been validated in research (Kimura, 2013).

Although there is no historical book that gives a clear picture of the content of psychotherapy, it was handed down in India in ancient times. The Yoga Sutra, written by Patanjali around 300 B.C. (TAIMNI, 1961), contains many descriptions of psychosomatic correlation. The fundamental sutras of yoga consist of four chapters, one of which states that there are nine conditions that interfere with a healthy psychological state, and how to eliminate these factors. It teaches that, by purifying the contents of the "heart substance", which is like a bag that

stores memories, we can reach the innermost consciousness of life itself. In addition, in yoga, it is believed that vexations in the mind cause various kinds of unhealthiness in the body, and that the root cause of suffering is “cognitive errors” called ignorance. There is wisdom that can calm even past memories, which are called trauma and PTSD today. In yoga therapy, meditation is used as a way to become aware of one’s own cognitive and intellectual judgments. Noticing “cognitive errors” in the process of re-cognition through meditation, The “Memory Purification Method” corrects the way we think in our daily lives and how we conduct ourselves in society. It is said in yoga that by controlling stress, true health can be achieved (Kimura, 2013). Research on yoga as a therapy began in the 1920s at the Kaivalya dharma Yoga Research Institute in India, and there have been reports of research on the effects of yoga therapy on natural disasters. The therapy helped alleviate the psychological distress of PTSD and depression among tsunami survivors in the victims of the 2004 Sumatra-Andaman earthquake (Descilo et al., 2010). According to a research report on the effects of yoga therapy practice on survivors of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident, which has been followed up since 2008, yoga therapy practice has been shown to improve the antioxidant capacity of the survivors and normalize the amount of reactive oxygen species in their bodies (Kamei et al., 2012).

1.3. Support for the Victims

In the affected areas, many people volunteered to distribute relief supplies and serve food. Other activities included debris removal, medical assistance, massages, and hair care. The Reconstruction Agency’s “Comprehensive Project for Supporting Disaster Victims” aims to promote initiatives that support victims to connect with others and live positively with a sense of purpose through the creation of opportunities for them to participate in activities proactively and continuously (Reconstruction Agency, 2021). The projects adopted by the Reconstruction Agency include those that provide places for people gathering, such as growing crops, listening to stories at cafes, enjoying music, as well as those that communicate about the disaster. A variety of support activities are essential for the reconstruction and promotion of the affected areas (Chin, 2019).

1.3.1. Yoga for Disaster Victims

“Anti-Aging Yoga” and “Isometric Yoga,” which were studied for their medical effects as part of the support for the Chernobyl survivors, were taught at evacuation centers and temporary meeting places in various areas. These yoga programs, which focus on isometric exercises and also incorporate simple abdominal breathing and mindfulness meditation, can be adapted to everyone, everywhere. Yoga therapy volunteers were deployed in 11 prefectures and Tokyo with 187 venues, 1267 visits, and a total of 8946 participants (surveyed in March 2016), and yoga therapy DVDs were provided mainly in Iwate, Miyagi, Yamagata, and Fukushima prefectures to support physical and mental care so that people could continue after receiving guidance. Participants in yoga therapy

sometimes talked about their physical problems such as high blood pressure, insomnia, dizziness, etc., as well as their feelings of regret for being unable to help others. It was reported that some of the patients said that they had adopted yoga therapy in their daily lives, and their condition had stabilized through breathing exercises (NPO Wind of Yoga for Reconstruction Support, 2016).

1.3.2. The Covid-19 Pandemic as an Emerging Problem

A case of pneumonia with unknown cause was reported in China in December 2019. After it was identified as a new type of coronavirus, the spread and severity of the disease was astonishing worldwide, and on March 11, 2020, WHO recognized COVID-19 as a pandemic. The spread of the infection also affected the economy, and had a significant impact on people's lives, as they refrained from going out and restricted the use of facilities (NHK Public Commentary on Current Events, 2020). Depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and sleep disorders are reported to be increased in such corona disasters (Cenat et al., 2021, Sasaki & Kawakami, 2021). These infections represent the most serious disasters, and they can easily spread nationwide. Infectious diseases have sometimes been said to have determined the results of wars and the rise and fall of people and cultures (Helbing, Ammoser, & Kühnert, 2006; Arimoto, 2020).

The support for the victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake is based on the concept of community building, and the fact that community gatherings were cancelled due to infectious disease may have affected the psychological aspect of the victims.

1.4. Purpose of This Study

Ten years have passed since the occurrence of the Great East Japan Earthquake, and some of the victims may have grown emotionally through their experiences. In this study, we focused on the participants of the yoga therapy volunteer activities conducted to support the victims in the coastal areas of Iwate prefecture, and examined the psychological conditions of the victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake and the role of yoga therapy in their psychological growth.

2. Research Method

2.1. Survey Process

The subjects of the survey were 20 people in their 60 s to 80 s living in Iwate. (One person was living in the Kanto region at the time of the interview.) We compared the results of the survey with those of a group of 10 people who had participated in yoga therapy after the earthquake and another group of 10 people who had no experience with yoga. The data collection period started in March and April 2021. The data collection method was semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face or using the telephone, partly to prevent corona virus infections. The time required was between 30 minutes to 1.5 hours, depending on how the survey subject spoke. The interviews were recorded with permission before the interviews began, and verbatim transcripts were prepared.

2.2. Interview Items

A large category was established based on the PTG items of [Tedeschi & Calhoun \(1995\)](#): 1) consideration and gratitude for family, 2) awareness and support for others, 3) acceptance of difficulties, 4) objectivity, 5) looking at oneself objectively, 6) finding a new direction, 7) affirmation and appreciation of nature or things beyond human power, 8) affirmation of life, 9) changes toward self-growth, and 10) activity. The total number of interview questions was 25. Except for question (9) “The experience of the disaster must have been difficult and painful, but do you think you have gained anything from it?”, each question asked about the current situation and the situation before the earthquake.

The scale used is the IES-R (Impact of Event Scale-Revised) Japanese version ([Asukai et al., 2002](#)), and PTGI-X-J: Japanese version ([Tedeschi et al., 2017](#)). These were also conducted as an interview survey using semi-structured interviews. The IES-R provides an easy way to measure PTSD-related symptoms. On the other hand, the PTGI-X-J: Japanese version is the most widely used scale to measure positive changes.

2.3. Survey Method

The verbatim transcripts generated through the interviews were converted into text data and analyzed using text mining techniques. KH Coder ([Higuchi, 2016](#)), a text-mining software, was used to extract the top 150 words in frequency of occurrence. The text before and after the word “think” was extracted by KWIC concordance and categorized in order to analyze the statements related to the subject’s mental situation. In addition, co-occurrence network analysis was conducted to clarify the co-occurrence relationship between the words.

3. Survey Results

3.1. Categorization Results

In the 150 words, there was no significant difference and similar words were found. The most frequently extracted word, “think,” in both groups was categorized by deleting “I don’t think” or similar answers, and then by using “words” that co-occurred with “think,” and the results were read as “mental conditions of disaster victims as seen from the most frequently extracted word, “think” The results of this study are as follows. The results of the categorization for each group of texts are shown in ([Table 1](#) and [Table 2](#)). The results of the categorization were checked with a yoga therapist for validity, and the main category of “with nature” in [Table 1](#) was changed to “connection with nature”.

Based on the results of the categorization for the yoga therapy participants group and non-yoga therapy participants group, the content of the subject’s comments in the interview can be divided into four major categories. The first is a statement that focuses on the awareness and perception of oneself, which fall into the main categories of “admit oneself,” “thinking mind,” and “self-awareness”. The second is a statement that focuses on the importance of awareness of the

Table 1. Yoga therapy participants: extractor term “think,” emotional state of the victims, categories and examples.

| Main category | Sub Category | Representative example (Excerpt) |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Admit oneself | Sense of self-belief | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think I have greatly recovered mentally. • I thought I was carrying a heavy burden, but I can do it. |
| | Strength of the self | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After the earthquake, I realized that I am more emotional than my husband. Before that, I used to rely on my husband all the time. |
| Surviving Life | Sense of accomplishment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think I’m living a full life, but I don’t know how other people see it. • I think I can accept this as long as I am not overwhelmed. |
| | Life Affirmation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no excess or deficiency. I think it makes life more enjoyable. I have a lot of pain. A little joy cancels out the pain. • I’m living my life with all these things. I believe that being alive is life. • I want to enjoy my life even more. Sometimes I feel like an idiot. |
| | Life Direction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I’ve been blessed with a lot of people. I think I’m happy. • We are all on the same path. I believed that life was about walking a certain distance at a certain rhythm. There was a time when I thought so. |
| | Trajectory of Life | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I’ve lived. I think I’ve been trying really hard. |
| Connecting with Nature | Live frantically | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don’t think I felt anything. But I sometimes thought that life was hard. |
| | Man in Nature | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The scale of nature is beyond the reach of human power. I think about it sometimes. • I sometimes think that humans are dominated by the rising and setting of the sun. |
| Connection with others | Healing of the Sea | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was thinking how nice it would be to see that big Pacific Ocean. |
| | Human kindness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human feelings. I don’t know what to say. What I think and recognize is that people are kind to others. • All kinds of people came. I was impressed with everyone. |
| | Respect for others | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can I explain people? There’s a lot of good people out there right now. • If I were like that, I wouldn’t be able to go there. I thought, “Wow, you guys are amazing” |
| Thinking mind | Relationships with others, make an effort | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We’re trying to make an effort so that we don’t have to take care of people too much. • I thought to myself, if I don’t treat people well, they won’t treat me well. |
| | Emotional conflict | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think I need to listen to them and understand them. |
| | Change in consciousness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was a time when I thought, “I’ve been living by myself, so I can continue to live by myself,” but after all, it’s good to have children and grandchildren and friends. |
| The meaning of life | Direction of thought | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It’s changed. The way I look at things, yeah. I think my way of thinking has changed. |
| | Acceptance of life and death | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I realized that people’s lives and deaths are a part of everyday life. I guess you could say I gave up. I thought it was just like that, and I got my answer and my mind settled there. |

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| | Hold on to life | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the midst of the disaster, everyone held on for dear life. I think more strongly about this after the earthquake. • Whether it was the earthquake or anything else, I realized that the most important thing was the lives of my family members. |
| | Spiritual improvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm glad that I had this experience after the earthquake. • I thought, "People are so insignificant." I guess I started to think that way because of the earthquake. I don't know, but I think so. |
| Thoughts after the disaster | Testimonies after the disaster | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think that most people had a major change after the earthquake. Including my own. I just can't explain. |
| | Recalling the disaster | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We seem to have forgotten about that disaster, but I think it's still somewhere in our hearts. |

Table 2. Yoga therapy non participants: extractor term "think", emotional state of the victims, categories and examples.

| Main category | Sub Category | Representative example (Excerpt) |
|--------------------|------------------------|--|
| Know yourself | Self Philosophy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I believe that compassion is the most important thing in my life. • Things are different from the way they were before the earthquake, I think. |
| | Self-affirmation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is an earthquake disaster? Are humans wonderful? Yes, that's what I think. • I believe I'm the one and only. I interpret myself that way. • I don't think I would accept anything as something I would never be able to do. |
| | My Tolerance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do what I have to do within my limits. And I'm sure I'll continue to do so. • People whose homes were swept away by the tsunami have moved to this area. That's a good thing. |
| Service to Others | Listening closely | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't know if I'm being helpful, but I can at least listen to someone's story. • I know I want to do things to help people. I think just getting that feeling is different. |
| | Get close to people | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I thought it would be better not to say such things in front of someone whose family member has passed away. • There's only one of me. What do you call it? I'm trying to be kind to people. • Maybe I'll help people, too. |
| | Contribution to others | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I wanted to help people who were in trouble. This is completely different between before and after the disaster. • Since my house was still standing, I thought I would do whatever I could to help the people affected by the disaster |
| Thoughts on People | Separation from others | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think the number of selfish people has been increasing since the earthquake. • It's strange to say that I doubt people, but I wonder what kind of person they are. Ten years later, I still think so. • I'm not sure what that is. Sometimes I wonder if this is what people are like. |
| | Gratitude for friends | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A friend of my daughter's comes all the way from Tokyo to visit us. I'm so grateful. |

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|------------------------------|---|---|
| The Impact of the Earthquake | Tsunami Impact | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I saw the tsunami firsthand. Every day I think about how the tsunami came from that ocean. Even though I don't say it out loud. I was near the ocean, so I thought there wouldn't be a tsunami this big. This tsunami, the rain, the unexpected happens. I don't think you can match nature. No matter who you are. |
| | Recalling the Earthquake | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As I have said many times, if it is not aired, it is forgotten. If you look at the newspaper or TV, you will definitely remember. |
| | Recollections before the disaster | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I always hope that things will go back to the way they were on March 11th before the disaster. |
| | Recalling the scene before the disaster | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When I go to my hometown, there is the Ofunato line, the embankment, and the sea. I always remember it. I really remember going to the kiwi fields and thinking that there used to be many houses around here. |
| | Family Retrospective | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When I wake up, I always remember the families who lost their lives. |
| | Concerns after the earthquake | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are places where no houses have been built at all, right? I'm afraid that houses will never be built there. |
| | The Power of Nature | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Isn't the most powerful force nature? I guess it's just a matter of how far a human can go to overcome it, but I don't have that kind of power. |
| Spreading of consciousness | Connecting with the World | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> After the earthquake, I began to think that the whole world, Japan and the whole world, is connected. |
| | Change in consciousness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I didn't feel it until the earthquake, but as soon as I felt the tremors, I knew I couldn't do anything. I've learned to be more careful about how I organize my surroundings. |
| Family End-of-Life Care | Caring for a sick family member | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> My husband died after taking good care of him. I was so glad that he didn't die in the tsunami |
| Connecting to the Future | Rebuilding a House | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I've been trying so hard to get back on my feet and start a new family. Hmmm. I think I'm going to make a go of it, though. My children are healthy, I have a home, I can eat. I think I'm happy. I always hope that things would go back to the way they were on March 11th before the disaster. |
| | Current wishes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'm not doing anything now. I would like to take a ping-pong class if there is one in the city. |

people around us and caring for others, which fall into the main categories of “connection with others.” The third are statements reflecting the expansion of consciousness toward one’s own life and the world we live in, which fall into the main categories of “surviving life,” “connection with nature,” “The meaning of life,” “spreading of consciousness,” and “Connecting to the Future,” which reflect the expansion of consciousness toward one’s own life and the world in which we live. The fourth is a statement focusing on the Great East Japan Earthquake, which is classified into the main categories such as “thoughts after the disaster”, “impact of the earthquake”, and “family end-of-life”.

The Pacific coast of the Tohoku region, also known as the Sanriku region, is a region that is often hit by tsunamis (NIED, 2021/11/1). Typical records of Sanriku tsunamis date back a thousand years, and in recent years, lessons learned from the Sanriku and Chilean tsunamis of the Showa era have been adopted. In the interview, one participant said, “I was taught by my father (how to act during natural disasters). I had a mindset. That’s what I relied on (my father’s teachings) when I acted.” It is thought that the residents have inherited the strength to have overcome many disasters in the first place. Comparing the words of the situation analysis results, positive statements are found in both groups. However, the participants not experienced in yoga therapy showed compassion and appreciation for others as well as negative feelings in their responses. They are considered to accept the current situation, yet they also have complicated feelings about the situation. Among the yoga therapy participants gained control over their emotions and the ability to look at things and themselves, objectively. As seen in the “think” category of the yoga therapy participation group, it can be inferred that many of the responses were highly spiritual in nature.

In yoga therapy, the perception is turned inward by becoming aware of changes in blood flow, blood pressure, heart rate. Caused by poses and breathing exercises, and the senses are sensitized by becoming aware of resonance and expansion in each part of the body through vocalization. Meditation is also used as a way to become aware of one’s own cognition and intellectual judgment (Kimura, 2013).

Reports in the U.S. that it may improve the functioning of traumatized people (Kolk et al., 2014) and In a survey conducted after the Kumamoto earthquake, it was reported that among the responses of disaster victims who had attended yoga therapy courses were highly spiritual responses such as “I am thinking about what my mission is and how I should live” (Yoshida, 2018).

The same result was suggested in our survey after the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Some of the participants in the yoga therapy said, “The yoga teacher had a great influence on me,” suggesting that yoga may have helped them become more aware of and keen to deepen their spirituality.

The following is an excerpt from a statement made by a participant in the yoga therapy participation group.

“I’m actually glad that I had this experience after the earthquake.

I’m glad that I lived through it.”

Traditional yoga contains the wisdom of how to utilize self-awareness and self-control in achieving health. The wisdom and techniques necessary to improve the health of both body and mind were extracted from these therapies and enhanced, and yoga therapy was used in many areas to support victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake (Kimura, 2013). The results of the survey called, “Words Ten Years after the Earthquake” suggest that yoga intervention had no small impact.

5. Conclusion

Through the analysis of the results of interviews with the victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake, the common feelings and awareness of the victims 10 years after the disaster were revealed. As for the psychological differences between the yoga therapy group and the non-yoga therapy group, the people in the yoga therapy group often made highly spiritual comments that indicated a positive outlook on life and psychological growth. In contrast, those who did not participate in yoga therapy made many comments related to their experiences of the disaster.

Clarifying the process of overcoming various psychological problems and achieving psychological recovery is of great social significance in reducing the psychological damage of future large-scale disasters (Kyutoku et al., 2012). Considering that we will continue to face natural disasters in the future, it is desirable to further examine the possibility of moving toward spiritual growth through yoga therapy.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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