

Spiritual information and meaning-making: exploring personal narratives of residents at a contemplative spiritual retreat centre

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Abstract

Introduction. *This study aimed to understand the role of information in the domains of contemplation, spirituality, and meaning and purpose. These domains can be a significant aspect of people's lives and rich in information phenomena.*

Methods. *We used narrative analysis, specifically the analysis of online videos in which people were interviewed about their lives after taking residence at a contemplative spiritual retreat centre.*

Analysis. *We interpreted the interviews through a lens of meaning-making and used a context-centric model to identify the information phenomena at a contemplative spiritual retreat.*

Results. *The findings: (1) Support prior research, which has identified that people engage with spiritual information as a result of a change in worldview, significant events, mystical glimpses, and to gain spiritual knowledge; (2) Deliver an account of the sources and kinds of spiritual information at a contemplative spiritual retreat centre; (3) Provide insights into how people interact with spiritual information during a contemplative spiritual retreat; (4) Suggest that residents at a contemplative spiritual retreat centre seek spiritual information primarily for affective outcomes.*

Conclusions. *We demonstrated meaning-making as a helpful lens to interpret information interactions in the domains of contemplation, spirituality, meaning and purpose, and value in life.*

Keywords: *information behaviour, qualitative research, contemplation*

Introduction

We understand information interactions much better in work and everyday life than in other domains, especially those described as profound, personally meaningful, and beyond everyday life (Kari and Hartel, 2007; Gorichanaz, 2019; Clemens and Cushing, 2010). Exploring these domains is essential, as they may be a significant aspect of people's lives. An example of such a domain is contemplation and spirituality.

In popular understanding, we often see contemplative spiritual activities as a transcendental growth process surrounded by searches for meaning, purpose, and value in life. For example, the UK Royal College of Psychiatrists explains that spirituality *'is experienced as being of fundamental or ultimate importance and is thus concerned with matters of meaning and purpose in life, truth, and values'* (Cook, 2013, p. 4). Moreover, the UK National Health Service agrees that spirituality is *'what gives us meaning and purpose'* (NHSinform, UK).

A need for meaning is frequently discussed in circles interested in psychotherapy, spirituality, religion and mysticism, where meaninglessness is often equated with unhappiness and unfulfillment (e.g. Pickering, 2019). However, information scholars have historically neglected spirituality and meaning and purpose in life (Kari and Hartel, 2007), even though Kari (2007, p. 958) noted that spirituality *'may actually define how a person or community views information processes and reality itself'*. Although some recent attempts (e.g., Siracky, 2013; Gaston et al., 2015; Gorichanaz, 2016; Chabot, 2019) have researched spiritual aspects in information behaviour, we lack sufficient studies in this domain.

Ruthven (2019) suggested that information interactions in the domain of spirituality could be motivated by a need for meaning and explained that people might engage with spiritual information due to a loss of meaning in life or a gradual awareness of one's present circumstances as deeply unmeaningful. In this study, we used meaning-making (Park, 2010) as a lens to analyse fifteen personal narratives in which people reflected on their lives after taking up residence at a contemplative spiritual retreat centre.

The findings: (1) Support prior research, which has identified that people engage with spiritual information as a result of a change in worldview, significant events, mystical glimpses, and to gain spiritual knowledge; (2) Deliver an account of the sources and kinds of spiritual information at a contemplative spiritual retreat centre; (3) Provide insights into how people interact with spiritual information during a contemplative spiritual retreat; (4) Suggest that residents at a contemplative spiritual retreat centre seek spiritual information primarily for affective outcomes.

Background

Spirituality is complicated to define. On the one hand, some disciplines relate it to the constructs of love/belonging/respect, meaning and purpose, positivity/gratitude/hope/peace, morality and ethics, appreciation of beauty, the divine, and resolution/death (Galek, et al., 2005; Swinton and Pattison, 2010). However, on the other hand, popular concepts such as spiritual awakening, enlightenment, spiritual realisation, and higher consciousness seem to convey the attainment of some form of wisdom or knowledge.

In information studies, Kari (2007) was the first to review the term *spiritual* and defined spiritual information as information that may be reckoned holy, be acquired through spiritual means, originate from a spiritual entity or be on the topic of spiritual matters (Kari, 2007, p. 957). In his review, Kari examined a variety of sources of spiritual information and the information processes in this domain. Inspired by this review, subsequent studies explored the spiritual journaling practices of Catholic university students (Siracky, 2013), investigated the information practices of Western Buddhists (Chabot, 2019), and identified aspects of spirituality in the everyday information behaviour of people in Laos (Gaston et al., 2015).

In addition, information scholars have identified spiritual needs in existential contexts (Fourie, 2008) and later stages of life (Baker, 2004). However, we do not fully understand how spiritual information is sought and used in contemporary society. Moreover, Ruthven (2019, p.163) argued that there is value in *'exploring how people seek information to understand their own lives and how their lives may be lived differently'*. In this respect, we might find influential frameworks developed in other disciplines helpful in interpreting information behaviours in the domain of contemplation and spirituality. One such framework is the Meaning Making Model (Park, 2013).

Park's (2013) Meaning Making Model is a framework for understanding spirituality in health psychology. The model asserts that people's sense of meaning comprises general orienting systems and worldviews and situational understandings of specific life events. Park explains that spirituality can inform people's sense of meaning by providing meaningful goals and a sense of purpose in life. Moreover, her model elaborates that distressing life events may lead people to question their beliefs by spiritually appraising the significance of these events and their relationship to broader understandings of life. Therefore, meaning-making may help interpret how and why people engage with spiritual information; however, we are yet to demonstrate its applicability to information interactions research.

To this end, after considering various ways in which people may engage with spiritual information, we found a contemplative spiritual retreat to be a novel venue for information behaviour exploration.

Research questions:

Our study aimed to understand information interactions in the domain of contemplation and spirituality. We, therefore, asked the following primary research questions designed to identify information phenomena that do not neatly fall into either work/problem-solving or everyday life (Savolainen, 1995).

1. What motivates people to engage in a contemplative spiritual retreat?
2. What information phenomena surround residents at a contemplative spiritual retreat centre?

Method

We used narrative analysis (Given, 2008), specifically the analysis of online videos in which people were interviewed about their lives after taking residence at a contemplative spiritual retreat centre.

Introducing Monte Sahaja: A contemplative spiritual retreat centre in Portugal

Monte Sahaja is a contemplative spiritual retreat centre in Portugal that offers silent retreats and contemplative sessions guided by a resident teacher or Guru (<https://mooji.org/monte-sahaja>). The centre describes itself as a *'haven for seekers of truth drawn towards spiritual awakening'* and provides guest stays and residencies, online spiritual talks, contemplative videos, and online retreats. Moreover, the centre is a dynamic place where residents share spiritual beliefs and practices typical of eastern traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism.

We were familiar with Monte Sahaja through occasional interactions with the centre's online sessions and found inspiration for this study in video interviews placed on its website, in which residents talk about their life experiences and understandings of the retreat. These interviews provided an opportunity to explore people's spiritual journeys and experiences.

There are 56 video interviews available on Monte Sahaja's website (<https://mooji.org/voices-from-satsang>). We filtered these videos through purposive sampling to include interviews of people labelled as residents (as opposed to guests) as these were longer interviews and more detailed. They are Gurudas, Nirmala, Shivam, Gayatri, Thor, Nirmal, Amara, Mukti Ziegler, Namdev, Bholenath, Lakshmi, Siddhartha, Govinda, Shiv Shankar and Mahima. In addition to being residents at the centre, 11 of them perform various duties, such as reception coordinator, AV editing coordinator, kitchen

manager, safety and guidance manager and personal assistant. Mooji is the resident teacher or Guru at the centre.

On average, the 15 interviews are 10.5 minutes long and are semi-structured. First, they elicit personal narratives with questions such as *What brought you to Monte Sahaja? What was your journey like? How was your first retreat with Mooji? Can you talk a bit more about the guidance you have received here?* In addition to these questions, the interviews elicit reflections on people's interpersonal relationships and transformations with questions such as *How has Satsang impacted your relationships?* and *What changes have you experienced in your life since following Mooji's guidance?* We transcribed these interviews and prepared them for analysis (see Appendix for a complete list of questions asked of each interviewee).

Analysis

For each personal narrative, we used meaning-making (Ruthven, 2019) as a lens to interpret why people engaged with spiritual information. Furthermore, we used a context-centric approach suggested by Kari and Hartel (2007) to identify the information phenomena at the retreat centre. We explored each narrative by looking for answers to the following questions:

- 1) Why did the residents engage in a contemplative spiritual retreat?
- 2) What were the sources and kinds of spiritual information at the retreat centre?
- 3) How did the residents interact with spiritual information?
- 4) What were the outcomes of the interactions?

Limitations

This study analysed secondary qualitative data that had not been collected for research purposes. Since we did not conduct the interviews ourselves, we could not ask the interviewees for clarification or additional explanation. Perhaps the videos have been provided selectively for marketing as well. However, we attempted to be objective about the interviews, their purpose, selection, and provision, and they provided an exciting possibility to analyse people's spiritual journeys.

Findings and Discussion

Why did the residents engage in a contemplative spiritual retreat?

The interviewer asked the residents about their motivations for residing at the retreat centre in the videos. Eleven residents answered this question by reflecting on their lives. Several of these motivations have been studied in disciplines such as health psychology and tourism (e.g. Winkelman, 2005; Kelly, 2012; Cheer et al., 2017); however, our analysis helped provide an information perspective by reexamining the kinds of outcomes the residents sought and what role information might play in facilitating them. We identified five significant motivations as follows:

Something missing

Namdev, Mukti, Nirmal, Shivam, Gurudas, and Nirmala described a sense of something missing in their lives as a reason for engaging in contemplative spiritual retreat. They did not attribute this feeling to any particular event but spoke of it as a general awareness of something negative. Chabot (2019, p.109) identified similar motivations for the information-seeking practices of Western Buddhists and noted that his participants '*had a desire or motivation to seek out a way to end their unhappiness, low mood, or dissatisfaction*'. We can interpret this sense of something missing through the lens of meaning-making as a manifestation of the inherent need for meaning.

'What brought me here? It is a long story, but, basically, life, I was trying everything, everything that was told to me that was good for life, and it was not fulfilling me somehow. I was trying many things and, in the basic things, I had a good job and, you know, a nice family and everything, but it was just, inside, something was not working. And that led me to a spiritual path' (Namdev)

'Because I found something was missing in my life. I felt a lot of darkness inside, and I was looking for help' (Shivam)

The vague nature of this motivation, as exemplified in Namdev's remark that '*something was not working*', is reminiscent of Taylor's (1968) visceral need. Although it may resemble a gap (Dervin, et al., 2003), a more apt metaphor seemed to be a hole in both senses of the word, i.e. a hollow space inside oneself and a situation to escape. Nevertheless, a conscious desire to overcome this negative feeling motivated efforts to seek spiritual knowledge.

Gradual changes in worldview

A slightly more dramatic account talked about recognitions that justified a change in materialistic goals, beliefs and understanding of what is meaningful in life.

'I started to recognise that, gosh, the one thing that's been my life's dream [to start a company] hasn't brought me the fulfilment or happiness that I am seeking. And that was a big recognition. And so, I started to recognise that if this thing didn't bring it for me, then really, none of my other dreams to get married, to have a wife, to have kids, anything else I just recognised, none of those things are going to bring me this inner fulfilment. It must be, I must start looking kind of this way (gestures inwards toward his chest) And so I started meditating. I'd never done that before. So I started to explore, I used the app Headspace, and so I was meditating for a while and then for longer and longer' (Gurudas)

Initially, Gurudas explained that his life dream of starting a company proved to be anticlimactic due to a persistent feeling of unfulfillment even after accomplishing his materialistic ambition. This disappointment caused him to reexamine what was meaningful. Therefore, we could interpret a change in his worldview as a reaction to the need for meaning. Ruthven (2019, p. 164) explained that this reorientation might '*result from a growing awareness that our lives are not working, leading to the desire to belong to a new community or social grouping that is a better fit to how we wish to live our lives in a more 'meaningful' way*'.

With a renewed understanding, Gurudas sought and used spiritual information and practices to help him achieve his new ambitions of a spiritual nature. Chatman (1999), in her seminal work on the information behaviour of female prisoners, described the role of information in one's worldview as she noted that some prisoners chose to swap habitual deviant behaviours (drug-taking) for those that were better suited to a prison lifestyle. She explained that '*what seems to make this change possible is the perception or worldview that there is another value system, which works better for them*' (Chatman, 1999, p. 213). Moreover, recent literature on religious disengagement noted similar motivations regarding meaning and changes in worldviews (Exline, et al., 2020). Albeit in the opposite direction, people may pull away from religion or spirituality because it may fail to provide a '*compelling sense of life direction or purpose*'. (Exline, et al., 2020, p. 10). Therefore, the need for meaning can outweigh commitments to existing value systems and worldviews.

Significant events

Amara and Shiva Shankar narrated profound experiences of stressful events and personal loss. Their narratives assigned particular importance to these distressing events as a cause for encountering spiritual information and seeking spiritual knowledge. For example, in Shiva-Shankar's narrative, he encountered a spiritual book in an Italian library and having resonated with its message, he wished to

meet its author, but going through a stressful incident that made him end up in a hospital, made this desire much more urgent and imperative.

'I guess the most kind of poignant moment was, um, my sister died when she was 21, and I was 23. And I remember like, it was such a powerful time and everything was just turned upside down. And I remember feeling like as though you're walking along with your head down and then all of a sudden you trip and you start to look around and, and ask questions, like, what is all of this about, you know, like when you experienced death of someone very close....And then it just, in that moment, it just became very important. And, so from then I started to just read, like I started reading books, actually, she was reading a book on Buddhism and I found that and started to read that' (Amara)

In an influential framework on meaning-making and spirituality, Park (2013) described two levels of meaning- (1) Global meaning as people's general orienting systems and worldview, and (2) Situational meaning, i.e. the meaning of specific situations or events. Her model proposes that—discrepancies between people's lived experiences and broader life expectations and desires create distress, triggering efforts to reduce the discrepancy and resultant distress. Therefore, stressful events create losses in situational meaning, intensifying the inherent need for meaning. For example, when interpreted through the lens of meaning-making, Amara and Shiv Shankar used and sought spiritual information to regain meaning in the wake of their distressing experiences.

Glimpses

Siddhartha and Govinda shared memories of mystical experiences to explain their interest in spirituality and motivations for engaging in contemplative spiritual retreat. Even though these experiences happened many years ago and in Govinda's instance in childhood, memories of the experiences continued to serve as potent drivers that fuelled their searches for spiritual knowledge.

'The idea of awakening or enlightenment was like something that, for me, was such a strong drive for such a long time. And that was also linked because I had a very strong experience at a certain point in my life where I really felt like somehow I was at one with everything and like my ego just completely disappeared and like, wow, you know, like there's only this, and there's only ever been this and suffering is an illusion. And it was just such a strong blast. Like an atomic bomb had gone off and my entire previous life was gone, and all that was left was just this like, you know, this awakening. And in that moment also, I felt like this is enlightenment. You know, it really, it really was like that. It's just eternal bliss, you know, but then somehow there was the sense of shifting out of that and something coming back into a shape or something like that. And then once that happened, all of a sudden there was this really strong thing of like, I have to get back there. I have to get back to that' (Siddhartha)

These experiences, variously termed mystical, religious, numinous and awakening experiences, have been identified by scholars in information science, museum studies and transpersonal psychology. For example, Cameron and Gatewood (2003) recognised a phenomenon of numen-seeking as a strong motivation for visitors to historical sites. Further to this, Latham (2013) illustrated that seeking mystical experiences could motivate museum visits, and Taylor and Egeto-Szabo (2017, p. 49) explained that an experience of this kind for some people provided *'the knowledge that this dimension of meaning and harmony existed'*, which could fuel a desire to recreate the experience through spiritual practices.

We noticed that Park's (2013) framework discussed earlier did not cater to positive events, such as mystical glimpses. Ruthven (2019) criticised her model for this reason. Moreover, information scholars have argued that positive emotions can be powerful motivators for information seeking and deserve more research attention than they currently receive (Fulton, 2009; Savolainen, 2014). For Siddharth, the glimpse certainly provided a short-lived dramatic contrast of meaningfulness and fulfilment, which amplified his search for spiritual knowledge, as demonstrated in his statement, *'I have to get back there. I have to get back to that'*.

A desire for spiritual knowledge

Although all the residents expressed a desire for spiritual knowledge in some form, Bholenath and Nirmal talked about their motivations by explicitly using the word God. They expressed a longing for God and a desire for ways to satisfy that longing.

'what brought me here is just this desire to know God and to yeah, just to know God and to find someone, in whom I feel the authority, the power, the love of someone who can make me know God, help me to know God, introduce me to God' (Bholenath)

'I always had a love of God in my heart. It may have not been so obvious as it is now since meeting Guruji. But there was the love of God and I was always searching for something to fulfil that, sometimes searching in the wrong ways but still always searching something to fulfil that, that hole that was inside' (Nirmal)

Siracky's analysis of the spiritual journalling practices of Catholic university students also identified this. Although her work did not explicitly refer to the motivations behind documenting and reflecting upon one's spiritual life as a desire for spiritual knowledge, she explained her participants' activities as attempts to *'grow in an understanding of and a relationship with God'* (Siracky, 2013, p. 95).

Initially, these motivations did not appear to be the same as information needs (Naumer and Fisher, 2010); it did not seem that the residents believed their concerns would be overcome through some information. Instead, as Chabot (2019, p. 109) noted, they were seeking a better experience rather than *'tangible information-like information'*. Although information needs are central to information science research, they are still conceptually under-theorised (Borlund and Pharo, 2019). Future studies may reexamine the suitability of the concept of information needs in explaining information interactions in domains apart from work/problem-solving and everyday life.

A common theme across the five significant motivations was emotions or affective states. The residents wished to overcome the negative affective states such as unfulfillment, distress, and unhappiness associated with the sense of something missing, significant events, and gradual changes in worldview. Moreover, in the case of mystical glimpses, the residents wished to regain somehow the positive affective states they had once glimpsed. It, therefore, appeared that the residents were primarily seeking affective outcomes.

What were the sources of spiritual information at the retreat centre? And What kinds of spiritual information did the residents use?

Before residing at the retreat centre, the residents talked about engagements with various spiritual information sources. For example, Amara mentioned a book on Buddhism, Gayatri and Nirmal watched online videos, Namdev said he used DVDs, Mukti and Siddhartha participated in online retreats, Shiva Shankar encountered a spiritual book in a library, and Gurudas mentioned using a mobile application.

'I used the app Headspace' (Gurudas)

'I was watching [the online videos] every day. I was just, I was obsessed... just watching Satsang all the time' (Nirmal)

'We did our first retreat online, and everything, I just remember, like, everything shifted really quickly' (Mukti)

'I just watched a YouTube and then that was really it, something just kind of woke up inside' (Gayatri)

Whilst in residence, the interactions with the Guru, became the central aspect of the retreat. In addition, they may have continued to engage with other sources such as books and the Internet, but we cannot ascertain this from the interviews alone.

The residents used terms such as teachings, pointings and guidance to describe the words spoken by the Guru as a kind of spiritual information. They used this information for spiritual growth and believed his speech to be direct, simple and thought-provoking. Govinda explained this as *'my God, such simple pointings no? and guidance no? It was even playful the way he put it. What a revolution, what revolution inside myself'*. Moreover, Gayatri described Sahaja as *'a place that people could come [to] and spend more time with the things that [Mooji] was pointing to, and to sit with his teachings and really reflect'*.

How did the residents interact with spiritual information?

A typical interview question asked the residents about the Guru's guidance and its effects. They responded by reflecting on their experiences and explaining their interactions with the Guru. In most cases, these experiences took the form of formal and informal interactions that proved to be insightful and transformative. In addition, Amara, Gurudas, and Siddhartha shared barriers that slowed their progress initially.

Interactions with the Guru: formal interactions

'The important thing was Satsang. Not about these [other] things when I came here'
(Govinda)

The residents interacted with the Guru through formal sessions known as the Satsangs. The centre's website describes a Satsang as *'sitting in the presence of a spiritual master where seekers ask questions and receive guidance, or Satsang can take place by following the teachings offered in a video, audio recording or book'* (<https://mooji.org/satsang>). Moreover, the Oxford English Dictionary defines a Satsang as *'an association or sacred gathering for the purpose of spiritual discourse with an enlightened teacher or mentor'* (OED Online, 2021). From the narratives, these gatherings seemed to be profound question-answer sessions where people spent time in silent contemplation after sharing their concerns with the Guru.

To better understand what a Satsang looked like, we used further video recordings of Satsangs placed on the centre's website (<https://mooji.org/satsangs>). The additional video recordings revealed that people typically came to the Satsangs with unsettling feelings of doubt, agitation, and distress due to the kinds of motivations described earlier. As a result, they sought help from the Guru, hoping that his guidance would help alleviate their problems. In this respect, the Satsangs seemed to have some commonalities with therapy sessions. However, they were distinctively spiritual and contemplative by virtue of the vocabulary involved.

In a typical example, a Satsang attendee commenced by sharing two questions with the Guru, the first one was about sadness and the second one was about relationships. She explained that she found the ending of intimate relationships distressful and tacitly sought the Guru's guidance (<https://mooji.org/satsangs/no-need-to-be-loved>). In response, the Guru shared his insights and explained that her problems resulted from a mistaken identification with a personal identity that did not have a real basis. In time, he directed her to carry out a silent contemplation to apprehend this falsehood by carefully introspecting who would be affected if her fears of rejection came true. He then encouraged her to continue this contemplation over the course of the retreat to discover her spiritual identity without personal needs, desires and judgements.

Therefore, since their distress had an experiential reality to it and the words of the Guru, in effect, suggested otherwise, this caused dissonance between these two opposing views, which the Satsang attendees were encouraged to resolve through silent contemplation. If successful, this would lead to

spiritual growth. In essence, the attendees viewed the Guru as a source of spiritual intelligence and seemed to believe that they would be relieved of their distress if they could attain his wisdom.

Interactions with the Guru: informal interactions

Another feature of the retreat highlighted by the interviews was the proximate interactions with the Guru. These interactions served as a source of support and validation. Mahima appreciated that the Guru was the same off-camera as on-camera, Shiv Shankar admired his non-judgemental attitude, and Govinda discovered that the Guru was just a regular person who was very easy to be around. In Thor's narrative, he shared an informal interaction that provoked understanding and determination. Moreover, in Nirmala's case, the interactions provided efficacy to the Guru's words. She demonstrated this by saying that *'[his guidance] is not something that he talks about. Like he talks about it, but he lives it. He lives this truth and he is the example for all of us that I have never seen'*.

'I was carrying all this dirty laundry and I meet Guruji on the road and I say to him, now you get to see all my dirty laundry. And he looks into my eyes and he says, I only see you. And for me, that really sort of put into place what my time is here for and what my life is about. It's not about fixing my person. It's not about becoming a better identity. It's about discovering who I am beyond all identity and all personal states' (Thor)

Most residents shared anecdotes of these informal interactions in response to the interviewer's question about the Guru. However, in some instances, residents drew attention to the interactions in order to emphasise the Guru's positive influence on their journeys and transformations.

Barriers during formal interactions

Amara, Gurudas and Siddhartha explained that their attempts to understand and comprehend the guidance initially hindered their spiritual growth.

'In the beginning, I used to pause sometimes because I wouldn't understand everything. And I might search for something on Wikipedia or look up the meaning of a word or something simple like that. But after a while that just relaxed and I could see that actually everything he's sharing with me sometimes it's just, I'm just really, I'm getting it in a different way. There's a different kind of understanding. And it's just that because it's not that he's really giving you something. It's more like he's removing the ignorance' (Amara)

'When I first came into contact with Mooji's pointings, it was like, I could sense that what he was saying was true and that it was really simple, but it was like, I kept getting caught up in this like really strong mind energy of trying to figure it out. And it felt like the more I tried to figure it out, the more complicated or confusing it got like you're getting closer and closer, but you're never quite getting to that point. But then somehow, at some point, just something opened up...And when that space somehow opens up, it's like, there's such a peace and such a calm' (Siddhartha)

Savolainen (2016) explained that external or internal barriers could hinder information seeking. Furthermore, internal barriers may either be affective or cognitive. In Amara's case, the barrier seemed cognitive as it stemmed from an unfamiliarity with the nomenclature. However, she did not directly address this; instead, she realised that she did not need to. For Siddharth, the barrier seemed to be a mixture of cognition and affect; as he mentioned, the more he tried, the more confusing it got.

We initially interpreted this interaction according to Kari's (2007, p. 957) assertion that people could supposedly acquire information through spiritual means. We based this on Amara's recognition that she received the transmission differently and Siddhartha's contention that a space opened up. However, this did not seem apt, as Amara explained that she resolved this issue by relaxing, i.e. reinterpreting what was relevant and essential. Moreover, Siddharth realised that his confusion was an element of the contemplative process.

What were the outcomes of the interactions?

Some final interview questions asked the residents about the effects of the formal interactions, i.e. the Satsang sessions. They responded by sharing both short-term and long-term effects. We categorised these as affective and contemplative outcomes.

Affective outcomes

For most residents, the Satsangs profoundly impacted their emotional well-being in the long term. For example, Gurudas, Shivam, Namdev, Siddharth, Mukti, Lakshmi, Amara, Gayatri and Mahima all mentioned positive affective states such as joy, peace, bliss and happiness. Moreover, Siddhartha and Mukti experienced a positive change in their interpersonal relationship.

'I feel so much joy, inside, and so much happiness and so much gratitude for this life I'm living and I know that's what I've been looking for all my life. I've been looking for this, for being at peace, for just being natural, which I couldn't. I didn't know what it meant before and now I feel, yes, it's like a completely different experience of life' (Shivam)

'[My wife and I] were watching these Satsangs together and really following the pointings together and coming to this place of clarity about who we truly are. And then, when I sat with her, it felt like we were just meeting each other again, for the first time' (Siddharth)

'But now I'm just sitting here in a room, looking into my own experience and experiencing the greatest joy and peace and lightness and possibility you know? Just a vast openness' (Gurudas)

Contemplative outcomes

Additionally, for Nirmala, Gurudas, Mukti and Nirmal, the Satsang sessions facilitated understanding and flashes of insight. They explained that the interactions had transformed their self-awareness and helped them grow spiritually.

'I just remember sitting after retreat and seeing that all of [my problems] were just like an approach I was taking of situations that were arising. So it felt like a lot of space was just opening up and at the same time being challenged as well, like the sense of who I am, like everything was just kind of falling away' (Mukti)

These outcomes supported Gorichanaz and Latham's (2019) conceptual work, which explained that information is involved in other aspects of life apart from epistemological ones. The precise mechanism of how information contributed to these outcomes is a task for future research and is something we look forward to exploring in our further studies

Conclusions

Our study contributed to the growing research on *'higher things'* (Kari and Hartel, 2007, p. 1131) in information science by providing insights into how and why people used spiritual information at a contemplative spiritual retreat. In addition, It demonstrated meaning-making (Ruthven, 2019) as a helpful lens to interpret the motivations for seeking information in the domain of contemplation, spirituality, meaning and purpose, and value in life. However, we noted that the prevailing frameworks on meaning-making and spirituality (e.g. Park, 2013) did not sufficiently cater to all varieties of motivations for spiritual information seeking; in particular, they have ignored mystical glimpses.

Our primary research questions helped us understand the role of information in meaning-making and contemplative spiritual activities. We explained that spiritual information facilitated these activities in various ways. Firstly, several residents sought spiritual knowledge to overcome a negative feeling of meaninglessness that manifested as a sense of something missing in their lives. Secondly, as their

worldviews changed from materialistic to more spiritual ones, some residents used spiritual information and practices to understand how they may live their lives differently. Moreover, others sought and used spiritual information to regain meaning after distressing events and recreate the dramatic meaningfulness they experienced during mystical glimpses.

Regarding information phenomena, we identified that the residents used various sources of spiritual information, such as books, online videos and retreats and mobile applications, before residing at the contemplative spiritual retreat centre. However, whilst in residence, interactions with the Guru became the primary source of spiritual information. These interactions took the form of formal and informal interactions that led to affective and contemplative outcomes.

We hoped to create a deeper understanding of contemporary information interactions in the domain of contemplation, spirituality and meaning and purpose in life within information science research. Our study demonstrated that using secondary qualitative data and frameworks developed in other disciplines may help enrich our understanding of the role of information in other domains apart from work-related problem-solving and everyday life.

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Appendices

Table 1: List of questions asked of each interviewee

Gayatri	Q1	What is Monte Sahaja?
	Q2	What is it like to work closely with Mooji?
	Q3	What aspect of Mooji's pointings resonates the most with you?
Gurudas	Q4	Could you describe your journey to Satsang with Mooji?
Thor	Q5	Was there an interaction with Mooji that touched you deeply?
Nirmala	Q6	How did your life change after attending Satsang?
	Q7	What about your family?
Mahima	Q8	When did you come to Monte Sahaja & How is your life here?
	Q9	How is it to move so closely with Mooji?
	Q10	What is Mooji like off-camera?
	Q11	How would you describe Monte Sahaja?
	Q12	What have you discovered from following Mooji's pointings for so long?
Shiva Shankar	Q13	How did you come to meet Mooji?
	Q14	How was that first retreat for you?
	Q15	What are the people like at Monte Sahaja?
	Q16	How is it to move so closely with Mooji?
Govinda	Q17	How have Mooji's pointings impacted your life?
	Q18	What inspired you to ask for a new spiritual name?
	Q19	What is Mooji like in everyday life?
	Q20	Is there anything else you would like to share?
Siddhartha	Q21	What was your journey to Satsang with Mooji?
	Q22	Could you speak a bit about your experience of coming to Sahaja?
	Q23	How has Satsang affected your relationships?
	Q24	What is your understanding of Mooji's pointings?
	Q25	What is Mooji like?
Lakshmi	Q26	How did you meet Mooji?
	Q27	How was life at Monte Sahaja in the early days?
	Q28	When did you know that Monte Sahaja would be an Ashram?
	Q29	Have you experienced growth in yourself and the Sangha since those early days?
	Q30	What changes have you experienced in your life since meeting Mooji & coming to Monte Sahaja?
	Q31	What is Mooji like in day-to-day life?
Namdev	Q32	What brought you to Monte Sahaja?
	Q33	What is it like to meet Mooji?
	Q34	Which of Mooji's pointings resonate most with you?
	Q35	What changes have you experienced in your life since following Mooji's guidance?
	Q36	Could you share one touching experience that you had with Mooji?
	Q37	Where do you stand in your understanding of what Mooji is pointing to?
	Q38	Is there anything else that you would like to share?
Mukti	Q39	What brought you to Satsang with Mooji?
	Q40	Can you speak a little bit about Mooji's way of guidance?
	Q41	How has Satsang impacted your relationships?
	Q42	Can you tell us a bit about your role at Monte Sahaja?
	Q43	What is important for you?

	Q44	What does the future mean to you?
	Q45	Do you still have desires?
Amara	Q46	What brought you to Satsang with Mooji?
	Q47	Which of Mooji's pointings resonates with you?
	Q48	Do you have any desires?
	Q49	Is there anything else that you would like to share?
Bholenath	Q50	Could you say something about Bhajans?
	Q51	Which of Mooji's pointings resonate with you the most?
	Q52	Is there anything else that you would like to share?
Nirmal	Q53	How did you come across Mooji's pointings?
	Q54	What was your first retreat with Mooji like?
	Q55	What have you discovered from following Mooji's guidance?
	Q56	Could you speak about the significance of Bhajans for you?
	Q57	Coming from a Christian background how is it to sing the names of Hindu gods?
	Q58	Could you share one impactful moment you had with Mooji?
Shivam	Q59	Why did you start following Satsang with Mooji?
	Q60	How was your first retreat with Mooji?
	Q61	Which of Mooji's pointings had the greatest impact on you?
	Q62	What have you discovered from following Mooji's guidance?