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## The Information Practices of New Kadampa Buddhists: From "Dharma of Scripture" to "Dharma of Insight"

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Graduate Program in Library & Information Science  
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy  
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## Abstract

The research examining spiritual information behaviours has been largely dominated by studies of Christian clergy using information in work tasks to fulfill work roles. Missing are studies of everyday individuals and the spiritual information practices they engage in as part of their everyday lives. Also lacking are studies which feature non-Western religious traditions. This dissertation fills this gap with a study of the everyday life information practices of western Buddhists from the New Kadampa Tradition. The study aimed to inventory their spiritual information practices, examine existential information needs, understand Buddhist spiritual realizations as an outcome of information use, and explore whether spiritual information practices were best classified as “everyday life” or “beyond everyday life”. Two methods were used to accomplish these aims. First, a qualitative content analysis of Geshe Kelsang Gyatso’s work, *Joyful Path of Good Fortune* (1995) was conducted. This was complemented by 20 semi-structured interviews of New Kadampa Buddhists from Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Discovered by the study were common information practices such as reading and listening, but also new intrapersonal information practices such as contemplating and meditating. The study also found that practitioners had existential motivations for seeking spiritual information such as preparing for death. An enhancement and critique of Dervin’s Sense-Making methodology was also undertaken. Textual analyses of Dervin’s writing on Sense-Making, Martin Heidegger’s ontological hermeneutics, Buddhist philosophy and the empirical findings were used in parallel to accomplish this. These perspectives were also used to explain the connection between information needs, use, and outcomes, offering an explanation of how one transforms one’s Being-in-the-world through spiritual information, effectively *becoming* information. A revision to the Sense-Making three-point model is also proposed which separates the hermeneutic act of making-sense from the verbings which constitute gap-bridging. Finally, because of the dual nature of religion as a way of life and a means to an end, it was concluded that information behaviour scholars need to reconsider what is meant by “everyday life”. It can no longer be “residual by nature” (Savolainen, 1995), given the prominence that spiritual information practices have in the lives of adherents.



## Dedication

I dedicate all the pure white virtues I have gathered here  
So that I may accomplish all the prayers  
Made by the Sugatas and Bodhisattvas of the three times  
And maintain the holy Dharma of scripture and insight.

Through the force of this, throughout all my lives  
May I never be separated from the four wheels of the Supreme Vehicle,  
And thus may I complete the paths of renunciation,  
Bodhichitta, correct view, and the two Tantric stages.

Dedication Prayer from *Offering to the Spiritual Guide*

## Acknowledgements

By remembering the kindness of others, we can make our mind light and peaceful. So, it is with a warm heart and a smile that I would like to acknowledge those who contributed in some way to the completion of my doctoral work.

I would first like to thank my kind participants, Kadampa practitioners from around the world, who granted me access to their lives and without whom this dissertation would not have been possible. I came away from these interviews with a strengthened sense of the bonds of our international Kadampa family. It was a pleasure to get to know you and your stories. I rejoice in all of your virtues and wish you success in your practice.

This work would also not have been possible without the gracious mentoring of my thesis advisor, Dr. Ajit Pyati. Thank you for your wisdom, patience, and genuine interest in my work. I very much enjoyed our conversations on the applicability of Eastern spirituality to LIS. To Dr. Lynne McKechnie, valued thesis committee member, thank you for your expertise and your relentless encouragement. I always left our conversations buoyed by your kind words. I would also like to extend a thank-you to Dr. Grant Campbell who helped guide me through the early stages of the program. Thank you for your always excellent questions which helped structure my early thinking into something more coherent!

I would like to thank my parents whose eyerolls, exasperated sighs, and endless questions kept me on track. Thank you for your generosity and support throughout my entire education and especially thank you for encouraging my curiosity, intellect, and love of learning from an early age.

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## Chapter 1

### 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 Studying spiritual information behaviours and practices: Everyday life and beyond

The study of human information behaviour is, by convention, divided into separate areas to pragmatically differentiate these different streams of study from one another. There are two main areas into which this research is commonly divided: (1) scholarly or professional and work-related contexts or populations; and (2) everyday life contexts and populations. Traditionally, studies of everyday life information behaviours have been referred to as “everyday life information seeking” (ELIS) which has become the common term for these studies (despite including information behaviours that are not ‘seeking’, e.g. blunting, avoiding). Reijo Savolainen, a leading scholar in everyday life information behaviours, notes that what defines everyday life information behaviours is the everyday itself “which refers to a set of attributes characterizing relatively stable and recurrent qualities of both work and free time activities. The most central attributes of everyday life are familiar, ordinary, and routine” (Savolainen, 2003, p. 1). Given the breadth provided by Savolainen’s definition, there are several significant contexts within the realm of “everyday life” that warrant further investigation.

One of these contexts in particular is religion and spirituality. Spiritual information behaviours are information behaviours that are related to spiritual or religious beliefs and practices. This dissertation relies upon the interpretation of certain religious practices, especially those that involve the use of texts and documents, broadly interpreted, as information practices. Understood within the everyday lives of spiritual people, these behaviours may include, variously, reading passages from scriptures, listening to an orally-delivered homily containing a religious message or investigating religious history on the Internet. These behaviours can be considered “everyday” as they comply with Savolainen’s characteristics of being “familiar, ordinary, and routine”. They may form a regular and significant aspect of an individual’s life and may include a familiarity with particular spiritual information sources. Indeed, the pursuit of a religious life is inseparable from the daily mental, verbal and physical actions that comprise it.

However, Emmons (1999) reports that it was early psychologist of religion Gordon Allport who was “the first to systematically distinguish religion as a means to an end and religion as a way of life” (p. 111). Religion possesses a dual nature: one nature that is orientated to daily life and one that extends beyond it. Religion speaks to some human beings’ desire to seek that which is beyond the everyday. Existentialist theologian Paul Tillich (1963) describes religion as “the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of the meaning of our life” (p. 4 in Emmons, 1999, p. 6). Within the context of information behaviour then, scholars need to account for the seemingly dual nature of religious information behaviours, to account for both the everyday life information behaviours and those that are seemingly “beyond” everyday life such as using information to satisfy deep, existential longings for meaning and negotiating living within an unpredictable reality. It is no longer satisfactory to understand everyday life information behaviours as confined to that which is “familiar, ordinary, and routine” but question whether “ELIS [is] sufficient in addressing information behavior within the context of the deeply meaningful, the unfamiliar, the extraordinary and profoundly emotional” (Clemens, 2015, p. 9).

This dissertation aims to fill a gap in the information behaviour and practice literature concerning religion and spirituality. Notedly, research already conducted within the realm of spiritual information behaviours is lacking an everyday life perspective. To date, the large majority of these studies conceptualize their informants (clergy and church leaders) as religious *professionals* who engage in work-related information behaviours and practices to complete work-related tasks. Considering, however, the findings by the Pew Research Centre (2012) in their study of the global religious landscape that 84 percent of the global population professes some religious affiliation, it is surprising that the existing literature on religious information seeking behaviours has uniquely focussed on this specialized group of religious professionals rather than on everyday religious adherents. Furthermore, Kari and Hartel (2007) lament that within the field of Library and Information Science (LIS), there is a lack of understanding of information phenomena within the realms of the “higher things in life”; that is, “the pleasurable or profound phenomena, experiences, or activities that transcend the daily grind” (p. 1131). To date, LIS has been largely concerned with research contexts that are mundane and that



focus upon ordinary, everyday-life problems. Instead, Kari and Hartel (2007) call for further research that begins to investigate the “significant dimensions of information phenomena that may have been overlooked” (p. 1131). One of the “higher” contexts that Kari and Hartel suggest investigating in a deeper manner within the context of LIS is religion and spirituality.

The existing literature on religious information, in addition to lacking examples of everyday life information behaviours, is missing perspectives from a variety of religious and spiritual traditions. The studies that comprise the existing literature are primarily concerned with examples and contexts within Western religious traditions, with the large majority focussing on various denominations within Protestant Christianity (and more recently Catholicism and Islam). Examples from Eastern religious contexts such as Buddhism are largely absent at present. Thus, this dissertation plans to address this gap within the literature by taking Buddhist practitioners and their spiritual information (i.e., their teachings) as an object of study. In addition to taking Buddhist practitioners as a research focus, the dissertation will also incorporate Buddhist philosophy and psychology into the analysis of the research findings in order to problematize the notion of information, provide novel insights into information needs, behaviours and practices in spiritual contexts, and enhance and critique popular ELIS theories.

The first half of the research findings have the goal of demonstrating how spiritual information practices comprise the large majority of Buddhist practice in the New Kadampa Tradition (NKT). This goal is important in particular because it will underline the importance of studying information in religious and spiritual contexts. Information is not merely required for “the way of life” (per Savolainen), but also for moving beyond it. This will be accomplished by inventorying the variety of spiritual information practices that can be said to comprise the practice of Buddhism. More specifically, this dissertation will examine the information behaviour and practices of Western convert Buddhists who have come to Buddhism from a different religious tradition, or no religious tradition, as well as study a prominent text in their tradition for evidence of information behaviours and practices.

The second half of the research findings have the goal of enhancing and critiquing Brenda Dervin’s Sense-Making methodology through the lens of Buddhist philosophy

and psychology. Dervin's Sense-Making shares a certain kinship with Buddhist thought: they are both aimed at resolving gaps in the experience of individuals. Martin Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics, which has been in long dialogue with Buddhist thought since the 1920s, similarly contributes to the critique and elaboration of Dervin's Sense-Making while simultaneously providing a "bridging" language between Dervin's "Western" theory and Buddhism's "Eastern" nature.

More specifically, this enhancing and critique of Dervin's Sense-Making explores the connection between information needs, everyday life information practices and outcomes of spiritual information practices that are revealed in the first half of the research findings and uses this Buddho-Heideggerian lens as a tool to accomplish this. This enhancement and critique of Sense-Making leads to a challenging of common notions of information, offers new ideas about information needs, and suggests an expansion or alteration of Dervin's Sense-Making "triangle" model into a five-stage "pentagon" model. The model offers insight into the nature of Sense-Making which Dervin overlooks (namely, hermeneutics), as well as separates this from the actions (verbings) that comprise gap-bridging.

By examining Buddhist religious phenomena through an information studies lens, it is hoped that this study can bring to fruition some potential understanding on the more fundamental or profound ways that information impacts human beings such as understanding the transformative nature of information and its ability to help human beings navigate personal existential issues. It also explores the limits of the information behaviour field's conceptualization of everyday life information behaviours and practices through a troubling of the concept of "everyday life" which often lacks existential considerations. Also, the transcendent nature of spiritual practice and spiritual goals creates a tensive duality when paired with the immanence of the everyday practices themselves.

## 1.2 Religious practices as information practices

As was mentioned earlier, this dissertation relies upon the interpretation of certain religious practices as information practices. Since this is a pivotal concept for the dissertation, it will be more completely outlined below.

On an everyday level, viewing religious practices as information practices hinges on viewing written and oral religious teachings as information (understanding information in a common-sense way). Also taking this view is Kari (2007) who writes, “From the viewpoint of information research, it is enlightening to realize that a religion actually boils down to its scriptures” (p. 937). For the information scholar, Kari’s words are helpful for the study of religious individuals and phenomena in LIS since traditionally, information scholars have studied documents and their contents. For the purposes of this dissertation, they are an anchoring point which initially helps to place this study firmly within the realm of LIS. Religion is a complex intermix of social, psychological, material and mystical aspects with components such as places of worship, pilgrimages, rituals, ceremonies, religious communities, and institutions. Therefore, not *all* parts of religion are necessarily information practices *in and of themselves* (although they may still contain conceptual or informatic elements). This complexity however also allows for an opportunity to move beyond traditional and common-sense understandings of information when the intangible and supernatural elements of religion, and their ability to be informational, are considered.

The anchoring type of information which is of concern in the dissertation has been deemed ‘spiritual information’ or sometimes ‘religious information’ to distinguish it from ordinary ‘secular’ information. A prime example of spiritual information from within the existing religious information behaviour literature on Christian clergy would be the Bible and its contents (the spiritual teachings of Christianity). It is frequently mentioned as an information source and as information itself in the literature at the intersection of information and religion. Again, the use of this simple conceptualization of spiritual information however is merely a starting place for this dissertation. There are other informational components of religion outside of the use of primary religious texts (although written and oral teachings and scriptures do take a central role).

In Indian and Tibetan Buddhism more specifically, which provide the philosophical foundation for the teachings of the NKT which is the Buddhist tradition that will be the focus on the dissertation, there is an acknowledgement of the necessity of conceptual minds as necessary for the attainment of enlightenment. Conceptuality in Buddhism refers to non-direct understanding (or cognition) mediated by language and generic

images. This is contrasted with non-conceptual or direct cognition. This is important to note because not all Buddhist traditions favour, or rely upon, conceptuality as a means to enlightenment (such as the Zen traditions which instead rely upon “spontaneous” experiences of awakening instead of a gradual path). Therefore, in practice, the use of conceptuality in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism means that there is an initial reliance upon texts and documents in the practices leading up to enlightenment. However, non-conceptual cognition remains the goal in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. Lopez (2018) notes that while there is a consensus that “Buddha’s experience of enlightenment [is a] a non-conceptual, non-discursive, direct experience of the nature of reality” (p. 17), conceptuality is “a necessary condition for non-conceptual realization” (Higgins, 2009, p. 258–59), hence the reliance upon words (texts and oral teachings) at the beginning of the path.

Within the Buddhist tradition, the teachings of Buddha are called *Dharma*. Dharma comes from a Sanskrit root meaning “to hold” or “to maintain” (Willemen, 2004). The Dharma derives from the insights that Buddha attained through his meditation practice and especially through his enlightenment which is the soteriological goal of Buddhism. Dharma can be understood in two ways. First, there are the *Dharmas of Scripture*<sup>1</sup> which refer to the written (*śāstra*) and spoken (*vacana*) forms of Dharma such as Dharma texts and commentaries as well as oral teachings or recitations (sometimes this type of Dharma is alternatively referred to as the *Dharmas of Transmission*). Dharma is often explicitly referred to as information in the scriptures as well as in the oral teachings by teaching practitioners (for example, Chögyan, 2015). Also, religious studies scholar Coleman (2002) refers to the Dharma as “Information and advice” (p. 188).

The second type of Dharma is comprised of the *Dharmas of Insight*<sup>2</sup> which refer to the realizations of Buddhist teachings within the mind of the practitioner (sometimes this type of Dharma is also called the *Dharmas of Realization*). Realizations are “A stable

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<sup>1,2</sup> This division of the Dharma into the *Dharmas of Scripture* and *Dharmas of Insight* was first mentioned by Vasubhandu (ca. 4th or 5th c. CE) in his work *Treasury of Abhidharma* (*Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*): “The Teacher's Dharma is twofold: It consists of scripture and realization” (VIII.39a-b).

and non-mistaken experience of a virtuous object that directly protects us from suffering” (Realization, 2015). For example, Buddhist texts contain instructions on how to develop compassion for other living beings. The instructions on how to accomplish this realization of compassion comprise the information which is present in Dharma books or taught orally. Instructions in this case of training in compassion may include thinking about or contemplating our own suffering and wishing to be free from it and then realizing that all other living beings wish the same thing. When the practitioner has generated a wish for all living beings to be free from suffering (the Buddhist definition of compassion) then the practitioner holds this object single-pointedly in concentration for as long as possible. Through continual training in the meditation on compassion, eventually and gradually it will become inseparable from the mind. Compassion becomes an instinct that accompanies every action of mind; it unceasingly manifests within the lifeworld of the practitioner and because this wish creates a calm and peaceful state of mind, it functions to prevent suffering from arising as the mind cannot hold a negative and positive state of mind at once.

The description above of the generation of the Dharmas of insight also invokes a series of information behaviours or practices that involve spiritual information. Case (2012) suggests that information behaviour “encompasses information seeking as well as the totality of other unintentional or passive behaviours (such as glimpsing or encountering information), and purposive behaviours that do not involve seeking such as avoiding information” (p. 5) while Savolainen (2008) defines an information practice as “a set of socially and culturally established ways to identify, seek, use, and share the information available in various sources” (p. 2). Stated simply, information behaviours and practices describe what people *do* with information or how they *interact* with information. So, when Gyatso (2013) describes Dharma practice, “Dharma practice is quite simple because all we need to do is receive correct Dharma teachings by listening to qualified Teachers or by reading authentic books, and then to mix our mind with these teachings by meditating on them” (p. 40), then it becomes very clear that Buddhist religious practices are information behaviours and practices. Dharma is the information, and listening, reading and meditating are information practices because they are the manner in which a person *does* something with information.

*Doing* something with written or spoken Dharma is the most important aspect of Dharma practice. Written and spoken words are signposts; they point to the *meaning* of what the words represent, meaning which is accessed only through actively engaging with what is expressed in the words of the text or oral teachings. Only then do the words function to provide freedom from suffering, such as in the example of compassion above. The meaning of the words, the actual experience of compassion within the mind, is an opponent to suffering. Gyatso (2011) writes:

Through studying many Buddhist texts we may become a renowned scholar; but if we do not put Buddha's teachings into practice, our understanding of Buddhism will remain hollow, with no power to solve our own or others' problems. Expecting intellectual understanding of Buddhist texts alone to solve our problems is like a sick person hoping to cure his or her illness through merely reading medical instructions without actually taking the medicine. (p. ix)

It is pivotal then for information scholars to study the physical and especially mental engagements with Dharma information and to understand these behaviours and practices as they relate to their causes (needs) and effects (outcomes) in addition to the usages of the words themselves. The examination of these information behaviours and practices also allow for further investigation into the nature of information as it transforms into its equally elusive cousin within LIS scholarship, wisdom.

While this dissertation hopes to argue that many Buddhist spiritual practices can be considered information practices, there are also Dharma practices which, for the purposes of this dissertation, are not considered information practices. This decision to exclude them (at least at present) relies upon their nature being primarily non-conceptual. These practices include preliminary breathing meditation which focus on bodily sensations, mantra recitation, and meditation on the mind itself (such as *mahāmudrā* or completion stage tantra). These practices are meant to calm the mind, remove conceptual distractions or allow for more clarity of other meditation objects. While spiritual information is used to instruct Buddhists initially in these methods, the methods themselves are not information practices as they do not initially involve the usage of language or conceptuality. Therefore, while they are not considered information practices for the purposes of this dissertation, they are also not completely unrelated to the information practices that comprise Kadampa Buddhist practice.

Finally, the dissertation often refers to “Buddhist practice” in a general sense as information behaviours and practices, but for the large part this was used as a shorthand for ease of reading and writing. In reality, when referring to “Buddhist practice” it is meant to be read more specifically as *New Kadampa* Buddhist practice. While the NKT shares many practices, philosophies, and rituals with other Buddhist traditions, there are still many differences among the many Buddhist denominations that exist, so it is difficult to make claims regarding *all* of Buddhist practice in all of these traditions. Any truth claims made here have limited applicability outside of the context of the NKT.

### 1.3 Why study Buddhism and Buddhists?

Besides Buddhism’s under-representation in the LIS literature and the author’s own personal familiarity with Buddhism, there are other reasons why it would be valuable to study Buddhism through an information lens. Globally, Buddhism is growing. From a worldwide population of 488 million in 2015, the population is expected to expand to 511 million by 2030 (Pew Research Center, 2015). This dissertation will be relying in particular upon so-called Western Buddhists hailing from the Americas and Europe. In the majority of these areas, Buddhist populations are expanding. North America contains the largest population of Buddhist practitioners outside of Asia (Pew Research Center, 2012), and it is within North America that the largest amount of growth is expected during the next fifteen years (Pew Research Center, 2015). In Canada, Matthews (2006) notes that “the numbers of Buddhists in this country have increased dramatically in roughly the past twenty years” (p. xii). In Europe, the population of Buddhists is supposed to roughly double by the year 2050 while populations in South America are expected to stay relatively small (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Western Buddhism, being a comparatively novel arrival to the Buddhist stage, is still generally understudied compared to more established Buddhist traditions. While this dissertation is not a religious studies dissertation, it may be possible that this dissertation will also provide further insights for scholars in that field. Finally, studying Buddhism within LIS provides the field with a completely unused worldview from which to draw inspiration and innovation.



## 1.4 Understanding the particular Buddhist context of this dissertation

### 1.4.1 An introduction to Buddhism

Because Buddhism is the main context in which the dissertation rests and recognizing that some readers are not intimately familiar with this context, provided below is an introduction to the history and philosophical foundations of Buddhism for their benefit. From a general introduction to Buddhism, the discussion telescopes downwards to understand the finer contexts of Western Buddhism and the New Kadampa Tradition (NKT) within which the dissertation fieldwork rests.

Buddhism began in northern India in the fifth century before the common era based on scholarship dating the Buddha's parinirvana (Cousins, 1996). Accounts of the Buddha's life from the *Buddhacarita* by Aśhvaghōṣa (1895/2005)<sup>3</sup> recount how he was born into the royal family of a small kingdom in what is now Nepal. Upon his birth, Siddhartha's father Suddodhana consulted a seer who foretold that his son would either become a great king or a great spiritual teacher (Book I, v. 73-84). In order to assure his son's ascension to his throne, he kept Siddhartha confined to the palace and showered him with many luxuries so that he would never experience pain or suffering or want to renounce his royal lifestyle (Book II, v. 20-32, 53-56).

Later, Siddhartha had the opportunity to leave the palace walls to explore life beyond them (Book III, v. 1-25). During these excursions, Siddhartha encountered human sufferings of aging (Book III, v. 26-39), sickness (Book III, v.40-47), and death (Book III, v. 54-62) and learned from his attendant that all humans must face these sufferings in their life without choice. Siddhartha was moved by these encounters (Canto IV, v. 98) and sought to find a way to solve them (Book V, v. 18, 23). On his last outing, Siddhartha also encountered a wandering mendicant, who inspired him to begin to find the answers on how to eliminate these sufferings (Book V, v. 18-23)

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<sup>3</sup> The Buddha's story here is related per the *Buddhacarita* with references to division (book) and verse in the actual text.



Siddhartha soon thereafter left the palace to pursue the life of a renunciant (Book V, v. 26-87); he cut off his royal locks (Book VI, v. 56-57) and traded with a hunter his fashionable clothes for simple ones (Book VI, v. 60-63). He studied with several yogis and other renunciants, mastering various types of meditation (Book VII). He also practiced a severe form of ascetism (Book XII, v. 89-93), believing that conquering his earthly body was a way to achieve liberation. Consequently, he became severely emaciated (Book XII, v. 94-97). After realizing the fruitlessness of his ascetic practice (Book XII, v. 98-104) a young girl offered him some milk which he accepted (Book XII, v. 106-108). Revitalized, he realized that liberation from the sufferings of old age, sickness, and death were not to be found through the pursuit of luxuries and material goods through which one was distracted from these concerns, nor through extreme forms of deprivation, seeking to master the body; the answer was to be found in a middle way between these two extremes while employing meditative techniques. Siddhartha then was determined to find this answer for himself (Book XII, v. 117). He sat under a pipul tree (Book XII, v. 112) and meditated until he had removed all of the delusions from his mind (Book XIII-Book XIV). He eventually became known as the ‘Buddha’ meaning ‘awakened one’.

The primary insight obtained during Siddhartha’s enlightenment is that of the origin and cessation of suffering, also called *dukkha*. Dukkha includes not only gross forms of manifest mental and physical pain associated with birth, aging, sickness and death, but also more subtle, pervasive sufferings such as anxiety due to grasping at phenomena that are constantly changing and lacking an intrinsic essence. Garfield (2015) writes, “The origin of dukkha is in primal confusion about the fundamental nature of reality...[this] “Fundamental confusion is to take phenomena, including preeminently oneself, to be permanent, independent and to have an essence of intrinsic nature” (p. 2). This fundamental confusion leads to the performance of unskillful actions, which through a series of causes and effects (*karma*) will ripen as suffering experiences in the future, in particular rebirth having the appearance of one of six realms of existence that range from hellish to god-like. Unless the performance of negative actions is ceased, then sentient beings will continue to take rebirth again and again in what is called samsara (*samsāra*), a continuous cyclic existence in realms where suffering is experienced. Garfield (2015) continues, “[samsara’s] cure is at the bottom a reorientation toward ontology and an

awakening (bodhi) to the actual nature of existence” (p. 2). The ontology of phenomena appearing to the mental continua of sentient beings is investigated through meditation. Once the primordial confusion has been identified, this pervasive belief that phenomena have intrinsic or inherent existence is negated and then eliminated through use of increasingly advanced levels of concentration (eventually a state of perfect concentration called tranquil abiding [*śamatha*]). Complementary to training in a correct ontology, is the practice of ethical conduct which is often formalized through taking vows to refrain from negative actions. This is because the practice of ethical misconduct (e.g. killing, lying, stealing, sexual misconduct, taking intoxicants) impairs the development of concentration which further hinders the practitioners’ development of liberating insight into a phenomenon’s ontology.

Not long after Siddhartha attained enlightenment he began to teach (*Buddhacarita*, Book XIV, v. 95-108). The Buddha taught for roughly forty years throughout the Ganges river basin. He established a monastic order comprised of monks and nuns called the Sangha (*samgha*), who also spread the Buddha’s teachings. The Buddha died circa 400 BCE (Cousins, 1996). The Buddhist tradition remained an oral one until about five hundred years after the Buddha died, when some of the scriptures were written down. By 250 BCE, there were about eighteen to twenty schools of early Buddhism, divided over issues of monastic discipline and scriptural interpretation. The modern Theravadin (*theravāda*) tradition is the only remaining school. Collectively, the early schools are often called the Sravakayana (from Sanskrit *śrāvaka*, meaning “hearer”, plus *yāna* meaning “vehicle”), or Hinayana (individual vehicle) which are concerned for liberation from samsara for themselves alone. The modern Theravada is practiced in Southeast Asian countries such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Burma.

The Mahayana tradition (from Sanskrit *maha* meaning “great”) developed and became prominent in the first century CE. The Mahayana schools are concerned with the *bodhisattva* ideal, that is practitioners of the Mahayana are motivated by compassion and seek to liberate not only themselves from samsara, but all other living beings who are similarly trapped. The Mahayana is practiced in China, Japan, Korea, Tibet, and Mongolia. The Vajrayana (from Sanskrit *vajra* meaning “diamond,” but implying “indestructibility”) is built upon the foundations of the Mahayana but incorporates Indian

tantric practices as a method for reaching enlightenment. The Vajrayana is often called the “quick path” to enlightenment as its primary practice is bringing the future result of enlightenment into the path. The Vajrayana flourished in India from around the seventh to twelfth centuries CE until invading Muslim armies forced the teachings northward into Tibet where it “became the most important area of tantric development” (Davidson & Orzech, 2003, p. 822).

Besides the three main divisions of Buddhism in to Sravakayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana, various schools and divisions of Buddhism were caused by geographical movement of these Buddhisms across Asia, reaching as far west as Alexander the Great’s empire in Afghanistan, to the north to Tibet and Mongolia, and eastward, as far as Japan.

#### 1.4.2 Western Buddhism / Buddhism in the West

The globalization that was a result of the development of the modern world saw Buddhism move westward into Europe and the Americas, and into traditionally Christian countries and cultures. Two interrelated phenomena can be used to describe this westward movement of Buddhism. First, Western Buddhism is the establishment or emergence of distinctly western forms of Buddhism, which are “homegrown” so-to-speak. However, these newer forms were not possible without their counterpart, Buddhism in the West, which describes Asian forms of Buddhism that have been transplanted into western contexts through migration. Both of these descriptions are needed to adequately describe what has happened, and is happening, with Buddhism in the western world. This section will briefly outline a short history of Buddhism in the West, its common characteristics, and finally the challenges that it offers to the future of Buddhism globally.

Early European accounts of Buddhism “came from Christian missionaries who were usually more concerned to debunk it than to understand it” (Coleman, 2002, p. 56). Buddhism was also taken up by intellectuals, and in the nineteenth century “Europeans began a serious study of Buddhist texts” (Coleman, 2002, p. 56). By the end of World War II, Buddhism was still largely engaged in as an intellectual pursuit, although it was beginning to have an effect on America’s Beat culture and their “vehement rejection of conventional American culture” (Coleman, 2002, p. 62), a sub-

cultural value which remains a “powerful undercurrent in Western Buddhism to this day” (Coleman, 2002, p. 63). A notable contributor to this intellectual pursuit of Buddhism in the post-war period was Alan Watts, whose writings at this time made Buddhism easier for Westerners to understand (Coleman, 2002, p. 64). The 1950s remained an important decade for the development of Buddhism in the West. Notably, Shunryu Suzuki arrived in 1959 to teach Zen to Westerners. He founded America’s first Zen Centre and Tassajara Hot Springs, America’s first Buddhist monastery (Coleman, 2002 p. 70). The popularization of the Zen tradition also was forwarded by Vietnamese master Thich Nhat Hanh, who fled to the West during the Vietnam War. The 1950s also saw the beginning of the Tibetan diaspora as the Chinese invasion of Tibet forced many Tibetans into exile. Coleman (2002) notes,

Tibetan teachers...feared that their ancient tradition was in danger of being lost. After generations of isolationism, Tibetan teachers began to make a concerted effort to pass their tradition on to people from other cultures. Some of those teachers inevitably made their way to the West, where they exerted a powerful influence on the new Buddhism developing there. (p. 72)

Among the first of these pioneers were Tharthang Tulku who established the first Nyingma Centre in Berkeley, California and Kalu Rinpoche who established centres in Vancouver and Woodstock, New York (Coleman, 2002, p. 72). Another early and particularly influential teacher was Chögyam Trungpa who “more than any other single individual...shaped the face of Tibetan Buddhism in the West” (Coleman, 2002, p. 73) as he was “unique among his generation of Tibetans in his understanding of Western culture and his ability to adapt traditional teachings to the needs and experiences of his Western students” (Coleman, 2002, p. 73-4). He was, however, a controversial figure due to his alcoholism, his womanizing and the abandonment of his ordination vows. The modern Shambhala tradition derives from his teachings. The modern Theravadins also came West, under S. N. Goenka, with their meditation tradition called *vipassāna* which is “the approach to the tradition most popular in the West” (Coleman, 2002, p. 78).

Despite the diversity present in western forms of Buddhism, scholars have noted that western forms of Buddhism share some common characteristics, and indeed some uniquely ‘Western’ qualities that are distinct from their Asian counterparts. Western Buddhism is often described as “new” (Coleman, 2001), “eclectic and pragmatic”

(Seager, 1999, p. 218), and “egalitarian” (Prebish, 1999, p. 70) (all as cited in Berkwitz, 2004, p. 144). Berkwitz (2004) also mentions that “A greater emphasis on the laity and the corresponding devaluing of monasticism, a preference for meditation over ritual, and widespread social and environmental activism” (p. 145) are further characteristics that are often employed to describe Western forms of Buddhism.

Again, the modern globalized world has had an effect on Buddhism in the West. In particular, Western Buddhisms have “been informed by continuous interaction with other faiths, both Eastern and Western, as well as the insights of the modern sciences and psychotherapies. All in all, the new Buddhism has a breadth of perspective unmatched in Buddhist history” (Coleman, 2002, p. 219). This interaction between a multiplicity of perspectives has led to Buddhism being employed in a different manner by each individual practitioner. Wallace (2002) notes,

As a general trend, it appears that the more religiously oriented Buddhists are, the less they tend to be eclectic in this sense of drawing from different Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions, and the more they emphasize practice of viewing the world by way of Buddhist beliefs. More secular Buddhists, on the other hand, seem less concerned with the intact preservation of ancient traditions, and the more pragmatically concerned simply with exploring what ideas and meditation techniques help them in their daily lives. The tension between these two trends—of tradition versus adaptation—is a prominent feature of Western Buddhism today. (p. 48)

As Coleman noted, Buddhism’s westward movement has also seen it intersect with modern science, especially psychology and psychotherapy. Virtbauer (2012) outlines three primary ways in which this relationship plays out. First, Buddhism acts as an “indigenous psychology” (p. 252) that parallels modern Western psychology as they share common features. Virtbauer (2012) notes that “Buddhism provides psychological methods of analysing human experience and inquiring into the potential and capacities of the human mind. Many Buddhist scriptures are kinds of psychological instruction manuals, which point to the practical realisation of their contents” (p. 253). Second, Virtbauer (2012) mentions how different parts of Buddhism, especially its theories of mind and mind training techniques, have been integrated into modern psychotherapy, instigating “innovation” and “newer psychotherapeutic approaches” (p. 254) such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression, Dialectical Behaviour Therapy, and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

(p. 255). These approaches “emphasise the relationship between the person and his/her feelings and thoughts. The healing process is based on the ability of the client to learn to become a neutral and mindful observer of thought processes without attempts to suppress or change them” (Virtbauer, 2012, p. 255). Finally, Virtbauer (2012) discusses how new movements within Western Buddhism have entered and continue to enter into “critical dialogue with scientific methodologies and findings” (p. 252). He notes that “Buddhism and modern science ideally share similar goals: Creating happiness by alleviating suffering through an increasingly refined understanding of how nature works” (p. 258). In particular, he points to Buddhism’s different understanding of reality as being experiential and interdependent and how this could undermine the “subject-object distinction...as a dogmatic instrument for tackling reality” (p. 258).

In the past, the different forms of Buddhism seemed to be more tightly controlled as certain geographical, ethnic, or cultural boundaries (often combined with political power) more easily delineated clearly who was an insider and an outsider and thus who had the ability to participate in Buddhism’s ongoing creation. In the West however, these boundaries are more porous and less clearly defined due to the “melting pot” or “mosaic” nature of certain Western societies (in the United States and Canada, especially). Boundaries are also less defined due to the prominence of individualism, where it is believed that an individual can direct his or her spiritual life as he or she sees fit, regardless of existing boundaries, leading to a unique syncretic melding of Buddhism with other religions or spiritual traditions. This leads scholars and practitioners alike to ask, “what is Western Buddhism and who gets to decide what it is?” (Berkwitz, 2004, p. 141). As older and more traditional forms of Buddhism adapt to Western needs and vice versa, there arise “contested issues of authenticity and change in religious traditions” (Berkwitz, 2004, p. 141) which has led to certain Buddhist new religious movements being excluded from the larger global Buddhist community (the NKT being one of them). It seems that, in some cases at least, “Western Buddhism just seems too different to really be Buddhism” (Coleman, 2002, p. 219). However, this opinion likely arises from those with spiritual and cultural capital and authority, and who have a vested interest in maintaining that capital and authority. For example, Hannah (2010) discusses an incident at a conference for Buddhism and women where Tibetan nuns were in conflict with Western feminists about the reestablishment of the female (*bhikṣuṇī*) ordination lineage.

The Tibetan nuns wanted to retain the spiritual capital they possessed as indigenous Tibetans over Tibetan Buddhism, despite their continued lack of status and continued subjugation to the monks. The nuns felt they had this power because of their inherited religious tradition; they felt that they could control the “Tibetan” aspect of Tibetan Buddhism and therefore the whole tradition (Hannah, 2010). Thus, more novel forms of Buddhism such as those arising out of the West and perhaps sharing the same lineages and teachers are delegitimized by those who possess the ‘indigenous’ spiritual and cultural capital to do so. Ultimately, however, these delegitimizations are temporary. Bhushan & Zablocki (2009) write:

and yet, if somehow, over time [this tradition] grows and acquires institutional longevity, at some point, as Mark Blum argues, even innovations like these could become part of Buddhism’s global diversity. After all, many of the ‘new Buddhist schools’ of Japan were suspect of authenticity at their inception. Thus, the whole history of change in Buddhism can be read through the lens of continual struggles over issues of appropriation. (p. 6)

One day in the future, these new Buddhisms may have accumulated enough of their own spiritual and cultural capital to be legitimately included within the global Buddhist community.

### 1.4.3 The New Kadampa Tradition

The New Kadampa Tradition (NKT) is a Western Buddhist tradition with historical ties to Indian and Tibetan Buddhism. As an independent tradition however, it is still fairly new and may also be considered a “new religious movement” as other Western forms of Buddhism often are. The Buddhist teachings of the NKT as well as its practitioners provide the empirical basis for this study of Buddhist information behaviours and practices. Below is a brief history of its establishment and a description of its current state to provide context for the study.

The NKT notes its origins, as do all Buddhist lineages, with the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni.<sup>4</sup> Lineage is important in Buddhism because it establishes the authenticity

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<sup>4</sup> “Shakyamuni” (*Śākyamuni*) was an epithet given to Gautama posthumously, meaning “Sage of the Śākyas.” The term first appeared on pillars erected by Indian king Aśoka (r. 262-233 BCE) honoring the



and authority of the teachings, so the teachings are not taken as mere fictions. The following is a brief history of the Kadampa lineage, noting prominent figures within it. The founder of the original Kadampa school is Atisha (*Atiśa Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna*, 982-1054 CE), who was a Bengali master who was invited to Tibet to further the spread of Buddha's teachings in Tibet. Atisha is especially renowned for a presentation of Buddha's teachings known as *Lamrim* (Tib: stages of the path) (Higgins, 1987), which is a condensation of all of Buddha's Mahayana sutra teachings into a graduated system of twenty-one meditations used to establish a spiritual foundation for higher teachings.

While "Atisha did not set out to create a new Tibetan Buddhist order" (Kapstein, 2006, p. 98), a new Buddhist order was nevertheless established based on his outlook on practice. Kapstein (2006) reports that the Kadampa "came to be distinguished by their ascetic and moral rigor in the pursuit of the bodhisattva's path...During the next three centuries the legacy of the Kadampa...came to form part of the common inheritance of all Tibetan Buddhist orders" (p. 99). Atisha's lineage passed on eventually to Je Tsongkhapa (1357-1419 CE) who considered himself a "rectifier of received tradition" as he re-established strict monastic discipline and promulgated the Indian Buddhist traditions of textual study and logic within the monasteries that he founded (Kapstein, 2006, p. 119-120). His teachings came to be known as *Gelug*<sup>5</sup> (Tib: virtuous tradition). Kapstein (2006) reports that "[Tsongkhapa's] dedication to the Kadampa teachings of the progressive path of the bodhisattva [lamrim] was such that he and his successors often came to be thought of as 'new Kadampa' (p. 120). Tsongkhapa's tradition became the modern Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism. The lineage passed through several lineage holders before it was then passed on to more recent lineage holders, Pabongkhapa Dechen Nyingpo (1878-1941) and his student Kyabje Trijang Dorjechang (1901-1981), the latter being the spiritual guide of many current prominent Gelug lamas and teachers.

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Buddha circa 250 BCE (Yailenko, 1990). "Śākya" references the small independent state which would now be found in modern northern India or Nepal where he was born.

<sup>5</sup> Alternatively transliterated as *Geluk*.



Geshe Kelsang Gyatso (b. 1931), the founder of the NKT, was a student of Kyabje Trijang Dorjechang. He was born and raised in Tibet. He fled from Tibet to India in 1959 with many other Tibetans in response to the Chinese invasion. In 1977, he was invited to the Manjushri Institute in Ulverston, Cumbria, UK to teach the Dharma. In 1991, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso formally established the NKT as an independent Buddhist tradition. Gyatso's purpose for establishing the tradition was "to preserve and promote the essence of Buddha's teachings in a form that is suited to the modern world and way of life" ("Modern Kadampa Buddhism," para. 14). The establishment of the NKT can also be viewed as a response to ongoing doctrinal debates in Tibetan Buddhism, as well as to Tibetan politics. While the Dalai Lamas have historically promoted a more "inclusive" approach to the practice of Tibetan Buddhism such as encouraging the "non-sectarian" Rimé movement (Tib: "unbiased") (Kay, 1997), others like Gyatso ascribed to a more orthodox Gelug view, leading to Gyatso establishing a tradition where this orthodoxy could be maintained. At the same time however, Gyatso was a reformer, changing many aspects of traditional Tibetan Buddhism so that they were more closely aligned with "Western" values (e.g. ordination of women, instituting democratic succession) (Emory-Moore, 2019).

Despite its status as an independent tradition, Gyatso transmits Je Tsongkhapa's lineage that he received from his own teacher, the 'new Kadampa', to his students. The name of the modern tradition is meant to invoke this lineage. The primary activities of Kadampa Buddhist centres and temples are comprised of three study programs: General Program (public drop-in classes), Foundation Program (systematic study of Buddhist texts), and Teacher Training Program (systematic study of Buddhist texts with retreat commitments). These programs are complemented by an assortment of chanted prayers and meditations. While primarily concentrated in European countries and in North America, the NKT spans also to South America, Asia, and African countries and comprises approximately 1200 centres and branches worldwide ("Kadampa Centres," para. 1). There are no formal numbers on the number of adherents in the tradition but given the number of centres worldwide they can be estimated in the tens to hundreds of thousands. Finally, it is important to note that there currently exists a division between the NKT and the Central Tibetan Administration (Tibetan Government-In-Exile) over the NKT's continued reliance upon Dorje Shugden, a Dharma Protector (*dharmapāla*) whose

nature and practice is disputed by the Central Tibetan Administration and Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama who banned the practice in 1996. This is a complex dispute involving Sino-Tibetan politics, intra-sectarian disagreements with the Tibetan *Gelug* school, and the transposition of these into Western contexts. It is not the intention of the author to summarize this dispute, but only to make the reader aware of its existence as it properly contextualizes the NKT among, and in comparison to, other Buddhist traditions.

## 1.5 Chapter summary

This first chapter introduced the study. Primarily, it outlined the reasons why the study is being conducted, namely to fill gaps in the spiritual information behaviour literature, and also outlined the large-scale goals of the dissertation. The introduction also provided context for the study by providing a brief history of the Buddhist tradition, of Western Buddhism/Buddhism in the West, and the NKT. The next chapter will present a review of the research literature wherein the dissertation will be situated amongst other studies of spiritual information behaviour. Also provided will be some introduction and context to the major theoretical lenses used in the discussion and analysis of the results forthcoming.

## Chapter 2

### 2 Literature review

As was mentioned in the introduction, studies of human information behaviour research have been typically divided into two broad categories: those studies which study scholarly or professional and work-related information behaviours and populations, and those that study everyday life information seeking (ELIS) behaviours and populations. Generally, work-related studies explore those information behaviours which are engaged in by professionals, workers, and scholars in order to better understand how individuals seek and use information that is related to the performance of their job. On the other hand, ELIS is a loose catch-all for those studies that are considered “non-work”. ELIS studies focus primarily on “ordinary, everyday” individuals engaged in activities that require the seeking and use of information during the conduct of their daily lives.

Within the realm of religious information behaviour, this division is also present. In order to further situate the study of the religious information behaviours and practices of Kadampa Buddhists, the prominent religious work-related and everyday life information studies that provide a basis for this study will be briefly presented, including an important subdivision of ELIS that deals with information behaviours in existential or profound contexts or situations. While this existing research is indispensable to this project, a study of the literature also brings to light gaps in the literature which this project hopes to address. Next, in order to provide better context for the analysis portions of the dissertation which essentially involve a triangulation between information behaviour, Buddhism, and Heideggerian thought, the literature involved in this triangulation will be explored. The literature review will conclude with the small amount of research that has been done within the field of Religious Studies on the NKT, the Buddhist tradition from which the study participants originate.

#### 2.1 Work-centred and resource-centred spiritual information behavior studies

Studies of spiritual human information behaviour and practices were first examined through the lens of Christian clergy as religious professionals, performing work

roles. This early research is information resource-focused, largely concerned with what information resources clergy are employing to fulfill their work roles as preachers, administrators and counsellors of their respective congregations. Of particular interest to these researchers are the factors that influence clergy members' choice of particular information resources when fulfilling these roles.

A series of doctoral dissertations makes up a majority of this research. Heralding the way is Porcella (1973) who investigated the information-seeking behaviour of clergy as it relates to their preaching role, noting in particular the influence of doctrinal viewpoints as a determinant for the selection of resources in the preparation of the Sunday sermon. Next, Allen (1987) investigated the religious information behaviours of Baptist clergy and church leaders in Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Honduras. She found that information seeking behaviours amongst those in the Central American countries and previously conducted studies were not dramatically different (Allen, 1987, p. 219) suggesting that theories of information-seeking “[are] not bound to one nation or culture, but that [they] may be applied to differing nations and cultures” (Allen, 1987, p. 222).

Phillips' (1992) doctoral dissertation examined information-seeking behaviours of Protestant ministers in Tarrant County, Texas. Similar to Porcella, Phillips investigated the relationship between the clergy member as a preacher and as a church administrator and their information seeking behaviour. Tanner's (1994) doctoral dissertation also addresses how and why ministers gather and disseminate information relative to the performance of their professional tasks (Tanner, 1994, p. 9). His study also considers in what ways “the pastor does and does not function as an information professional” (p. 2). Tanner (1994) elucidates how clergy are gatherers and disseminators of spiritual knowledge (p. 99). Interestingly, he also reports on the “high degree of personal involvement with both their topics and information sources...the second most frequently used ‘source’ in the sermons I observed was the personal experiences of the pastor” (p. 321). This interpretation of self or personal experience as an information source corresponds to Dervin's (2003/1999b) definition of information as “sense made” (p. 150) as well as Pollak's (2015) definition of “information as experience” encompassing “sensation, emotion, fact, skill, knowledge, or understanding acquired or otherwise derived from interactive participation in a social or solitary context, or occurring at some

point thereafter as a result of contemplation and reflection” (p. 255-56). Given that Tanner’s goal was to demonstrate how clergy members are gatherers and disseminators of spiritual knowledge, his finding that experiential information comprises a large part of his sample’s religious information behaviour begins the conversation about spiritual information or knowledge not necessarily being confined to material or documented manifestations of information.

Wicks (1999) builds upon the work of Porcella (1973) and Phillips (1992) by examining a “fuller” spectrum of a clergy member’s work roles as compared to earlier studies (i.e. preaching, caregiving and administering as compared to only one of these roles) and the information seeking behaviour associated with these roles. Later, Lambert (2010) presents another study of the information behaviour of clergy. Baptists are again the object of study. The focus of the study is information-seeking behaviour as it relates to Lambert’s respondents’ administrative roles. More recently, a study by Saleh and Abu Bakar (2013) features the first non-Christians in the religious information behaviour of clergy literature examined here. The informants of Saleh & Abu Bakar’s study were Muslim clerics—*Ulama*—in Borno State, Nigeria. In particular, they investigated the information-seeking behaviours of the *Ulama* in regard to the practice of their preaching and counselling roles. While the above studies all took a work-centred approach and conceptualized their informants as working professionals, Saleh and Abu Bakar’s study is the first to rely theoretically upon a theory of work-related information-seeking behaviour, the “Professional Information Searching Strategy Model” of Leckie, Pettigrew, and Sylvain (1996). They concluded that the findings of their study “could best be described as linear and procedural along the features of the behavior in the model” (p. 45). A study of Catholic priests in Croatia also used the Leckie, Pettigrew, and Sylvain model to understand the information seeking and use by these priests. Lacovic and Tanackovic’s (2018) study of Catholic priests found similar results to studies of clergy above. They also found that different information resources were consulted based on role or function and that there was a preference for denominational resources when preparing for worship.

In summary, these work and resource-centred studies focussed on the effects of the different roles that clergy perform within their religions, denominations, and

congregations; nearly every study examined clergy as working preachers, administrators or counsellors. This was often examined in conjunction with other variables related to information seeking such as demographics and the effects of doctrinal positions.

## 2.2 Person-centred, work-related spiritual information behaviour studies

The large majority of studies featuring spiritual information behaviours have been focussed on work contexts and emphasize the choice of information resources. More recent studies of work-related information behaviours have begun to explore religious information behaviour with a more person-centred focus, rather than a resource-centred focus. These studies emphasize the human natures of the clergy and church leaders which again are the focus of these studies. These studies introduce concepts that are important to the dissertation such as use of divine beings and the use of information sources as a religious or spiritual practice.

The first of these studies is a 2007 doctoral dissertation by Roland who examined the Sense-Making of a single Lutheran minister as he interpreted Christian scripture in preparation for the Sunday sermon. Roland's participant described the sermon preparation process as a "collaborative effort with the Holy Spirit" (Roland, 2007 p. 136) in which the Holy Spirit guided or had input into the selection of Scripture texts (p. 138-9). Roland (2007) theorized, using Dervin's Sense-Making, that his informant's hermeneutical interaction with the Holy Spirit can be understood as "one of the many ways that an individual may make sense of his reality" that "combines connectivities both anchored in the real and soar beyond the real by faith" (p. 136). Next, Michels (2011) presents a small discussion of religious everyday life information behaviours, specifically the use of prayer in the information seeking of church leaders. Participants described the role of prayer in two ways: as a means of gathering information or as an information resource, and as a way to assist in interpretation, discernment or confirmation when evaluating information (Michels, 2011, p. 4). Following this closely, Michels' (2012) study sought to examine the question, "What is the [information seeking] experience like for leaders of churches in transition as they seek to answer the question of what God's will is for their churches?" (p. 17). Michels found that church leaders engaged in information seeking behaviours as a personal faith builder (a religious practice) and as a

means to perform their roles as leaders within the church. Similar to his findings above, Michels found that prayer played a significant role in the information-seeking of these church leaders as they sought God's will for their church. Michels' findings within a religious context provide some introductory examples in interpreting religious practices as information practices when they involve information. The work of the Finnish scholar Jarkko Kari, whose work is examined later, performs a similar function.

## 2.3 Spiritual everyday life information behaviour studies

### 2.3.1 Dervin's Sense-Making methodology and the study of spiritual information behaviour

ELIS theories provide useful frameworks for understanding religious everyday life information seeking. Despite the growing number of ELIS studies, Savaolinen (2008) laments how "we lack qualitative research exploring how people make use of diverse information sources to further their everyday projects" (p. 7). This is especially true in regard to the pursuit of religious beliefs and practices, which are an important aspect of many people's everyday lives. Dervin's Sense-Making methodology will be a primary focus of the second half of the research findings where it is elaborated upon and critiqued in light of Buddhist and Heideggerian thought. While the theory itself will be introduced in depth later (see section 5.2), it is important here to note how Dervin's Sense-Making has been used in the study of spiritual information behaviours in order to provide evidence to its suitability for studying spiritual information behaviours.

In religious information-seeking contexts, Sense-Making has been used by Roland (2007; 2008) to study the Sense-Making of a clergy member as he prepares and writes a sermon, and as well by Coco (1999) who examined conflicts between individual Catholics' daily 'mundane' Sense-Making and the orthodox teachings of the Church. Hickey (2017) makes use of Sense-Making to understand the process of discernment of a vocation to religious life. Some further studies by other others that employ Sense-Making in a religious context are summarized briefly in Dervin et al. (2011).

### 2.3.2 Some recent studies on spiritual everyday life information behaviours and practices

Studies of the spiritual everyday life information behaviours and practices are relatively new in the history of the study of spiritual information behaviours. While there remains a paucity of examples, there have been several excellent studies that have begun to expand the study of spiritual information behaviours beyond those of religious professionals.

A study by Gaston, Dorner, and Johnstone (2015) noted the first instance of Buddhists' information behaviour being studied by LIS scholars. These scholars studied Laotian Buddhists living in Laos. They were interested in the ways in which the Laotian Buddhist culture influenced their Laotian participants' everyday information behaviour. They discovered that there was indeed some influence. Notably, the Buddhist culture affected their preference of information sources which included Buddhist monks and fortune tellers to make good decisions as well as affected their wish to not share or disclose information to others in an effort to "save face" and maintain their reputation. The largest difference in how this study differs from the present study of Buddhists in that the Buddhists in Gaston et al.'s study are culturally Buddhist while the Buddhists in this study became so through conversion.

Dankasa (2016) studied Catholic priests living and working in Nigeria. He primarily examined their information needs in both work and non-work settings. He found that their information needs were not able to be divided up into these two realms. Instead, they frequently overlapped and he concluded that "everyday life information needs comprise both work and non-work needs" in the lives of these priests.

Guzik (2017), in her doctoral dissertation, examined the conversion experiences of new Muslims in Toronto, Canada. Guzik determined that information practices are an integral component to their conversion experiences and to the continued construction of their religious identity and experience in their everyday life. In their everyday life context, information not only took traditional documentary forms but also extended to "embodied forms of expression such as clothing, movements, words, and verbal references to key issues and debates, historical moments, influential figures, social norms and activities" (p. iii).



Hickey (2017) studied the information-seeking behaviour of Catholic women discerning a vocation to religious life. Hickey frames the discerning as an information-seeking process “as it seeks an answer to a question, albeit from a divine source” (p. 3). Hickey found that while these women frequently used online resources as part of their discernment process, that face-to-face interactions with Sisters were far more fruitful and helpful in this search process. This led her to coin the concept of “limited internet effectiveness” wherein the human connection in the process of sharing and gathering information was an important component of the process.

These studies may be considered ‘everyday’ in that they studied the everyday adherents of these faiths pursuing their religious paths. Similar between these studies is that information behaviours and practices feature as part of the religious practices mentioned in these studies. These studies also provide evidence that religious beliefs can be influential in determining everyday life information behaviours in general. They also push the boundaries on what is considered to be information and how that information can or should be retrieved.

### 2.3.3 The work of Jarkko Kari on the paranormal

Jarkko Kari is a Finnish scholar currently affiliated with the University of Tampere in Finland. A large part of his work investigates the spiritual and paranormal and everyday life information behaviours and practices. Noting the virtual non-existence of information studies concerning the spiritual (p. 3), Kari’s doctoral dissertation (2001) examined the needs, seeking and outcomes of information concerning the paranormal. Kari’s dissertation served as a loose model for this dissertation in that while some studies focus exclusively on information needs, seeking, or outcomes of information behaviour, his incorporated all of these aspects. Notably, Kari (2001) suggests that “the questions representing information needs are more versatile than what has been believed to date,” (p. 210) making room for further explanation and exploration of what this range of questions could possibly be. This is related to another conclusion: that within the field of information studies, scholars have forgotten to explore “the perceptual potentiality of human beings for obtaining and processing information” (p. 210). Kari calls for more research into where the perceptual boundaries of human beings are challenged (that is, beyond the senses) with the goals of troubling the traditional boundaries of information.

Kari's more recent research on spiritual and paranormal information comes from a pair of content analyses of published spiritual and paranormal texts in the Finnish language. First, in 2009, Kari examined informational uses of information with an eye to providing finer detail into the complexities of information use theories and to create a taxonomy of the informational uses of spiritual information. In 2011, Kari explored the outcomes of spiritual information. He defines an information outcome as "any process that ensues from receiving a message" (2011, p. 63), a phenomenon that is similar to information use. The content analysis reveals five primary types of information outcomes from spiritual information which Kari (2011) defines as "a message originally provided or received by extraphysical means" (p. 63).

Kari's findings in particular validate the further study of new ways of understanding the motivations behind searching for information, stating that these "are much more heterogeneous than presumed by the rationalistic 'school of problem-solving'" (2001, p. 209-210), allowing for the influence of other fields such as psychology, philosophy or religious studies to suggest alternatives. Furthermore, Kari's emphasis on studying the uses of information and the outcomes of engaging with information highlight an important, but often overlooked aspect of information behaviour as much of the focus of LIS research has been on information retrieval rather than on its use. More investigation is needed to examine more closely how information changes human beings. Finally, Kari's research also validates the further study of new ways of understanding the nature of information not based on unexamined or ordinary modes of perception, but rather on religious or spiritual epistemologies.

#### 2.3.4 ELIS studies of so-called 'beyond' everyday life studies

There exists an important subsection of ELIS studies which engage with the "deeply meaningful and profoundly personal" (Clemens & Cushing, 2010, p. 1) aspects of everyday life. Religious information behaviours could be said to occupy, or be related to, this subsection but have not directly been studied within existential or profound contexts that have been studied here. Clemens and Cushing in their 2010 studies of birthmothers giving their infants up for adoption, and the children of sperm donors, attempt to establish this subsection as a distinct type of information behaviour, coining it "beyond everyday life information seeking". However, these are also best defined at present as ELIS

studies because they feature unusual information phenomena and situations that many human beings may nevertheless have to grapple with at some point in their lifetime outside of work or professional contexts. Based on their participants' responses, Clemens and Cushing characterize 'beyond' everyday life information seeking as far from routine involving individuals traversing unfamiliar territory in their lives such as situations that they never perceived themselves going through as well as using unfamiliar information sources (2010, p. 7-9). Clemens and Cushing also report that "Several factors push this information seeking situation beyond the everyday, including stress, emotion, secrecy and shame surrounding the decision process" (p. 9). The effects of 'beyond' everyday life information seeking are notably different as well. Instead of perhaps mere learning, the individuals in Clemens' and Cushings' studies were "[forced] to incorporate their new understanding of themselves into existing information [about themselves]" (2010, p. 10) noting an existential effect of this information seeking upon their identity.

Other studies of deeply meaningful and profoundly personal topics mostly involve the investigation of information needs of dying individuals. The earliest is a literature review on information behaviour and dying from a variety of fields, including health information science and LIS. The authors, Donat and Fisher (2002), conclude from their literature review that "little research has examined dying and death from an information perspective. The scant research that exists, however, suggests that information is critical at different stages and to many different actors involved in the process" (p. 184). Baker (2004) investigated information needs at the time of death through the content analysis of a non-fiction work *Conversations at Midnight: Coming to Terms with Dying and Death* (1993) which is a written conversation between a dying man and his wife who is a clinical social worker and grief counsellor. Baker describes a variety of practices in which spiritual information is involved: (1) finding answers within yourself; (2) gaining trust and confidence in pursuing your inner journey; (3) following a process of deeper thought and curiosity; and (4) recognizing the preciousness of the experience of dying (Baker, 2004, p. 81). Additionally, Fourie (2008, 2012) addresses the information needs of patients in cancer palliative care. She (2008) notes that the existential context of her informants makes understanding the information behaviour of palliative cancer patients complex ("Selected Findings," para. 1).

Finally, Ulland and DeMarinis (2014) engaged in a qualitative study of twelve professional therapists in Norway whose goal was to “explore how therapists’ backgrounds and existential information influence their therapeutic practice and philosophy of care, and the use of existential information in psychotherapy” (p. 582). Of particular benefit to LIS, Ulland and DeMarinis provide a working definition of existential information. They (2014) write, “Existential information includes both the searching and longing for meaning and significance in life – and the interpretations and answers given in religious, spiritual and other types of worldview expressions” (p. 586). This definition is aligned with previous understandings of existential gaps and life projects that have been alluded to elsewhere in this review.

It is evident from the few studies that exist on the subject of the so-called ‘beyond’ everyday life information studies that far more research is needed in this area to illuminate the boundaries of ELIS or ‘beyond’ ELIS or whatever it may be. Is Clemens’ and Cushing’s (2010) distinction of information behaviours that are “deeply meaningful and profoundly personal” (p. 1) really a third facet of life experience? Is this distinction between ELIS and beyond ELIS real?

Furthermore, within the existential contexts that this research is situated, there is no discussion around the unique nature of these information needs. For instance, if inner peace is an information need, as Baker (2004) discovered from her study, what implications does this have for defining information and understanding information behaviours and practices? How are existential needs different from, or similar to, other information needs? Fourie (2008) highlights gaps in this area of study in particular mentioning the need for research into “Dormant information needs, unawareness of information needs and difficulty in expressing information needs” (“Discussion,” para. 1) which are also related to the examples of extensive life projects in Savolainen’s ELIS theories and life-long gaps in sense-making (to be discussed later). Also, she mentions a need for “Theories that may shed light on information behaviour in existential contexts” (“Discussion,” para. 1). It is a hope that this dissertation will be able to contribute to the discussion about this area of information practices.

## 2.4 Situating the analysis: Introduction to phenomenology in information behaviour, Heidegger and Buddhism

This next section of the literature review will examine the relationship between the use of phenomenology in information behaviour research, the use of Heidegger by LIS scholars, the phenomenological methods of Buddhism, and the long relationship between Buddhism and Heidegger. In turn, this will establish a foundation for understanding the use of phenomenology, Heidegger, and especially Buddhism to inform information behaviours and practices in a Buddhist context which is the goal of the second part of the research findings.

Since the “user turn” in LIS research (Dervin & Nilan, 1986), information behaviour researchers have been increasingly interested in the experiences of individuals to better understand how they interact with information (broadly speaking) in order to build better information retrieval systems and design better instruction and library programming that are responsive to users rather than imposed upon users. This turn followed a larger trend in the research methodologies of the social sciences which began, circa 1970, to increasingly rely upon qualitative methods which focused on the qualities of phenomena experienced by individuals. In information behaviour research, which flourished as a result of the “user turn”, qualitative methods dominate the ways in which scholars investigate the behaviours and experiences of human individuals as they use information (Wilson, 2010). Because of the focus on the experiences of individuals, phenomenology has become an important component of qualitative research both as a foundational philosophical tradition and as a method of inquiry in itself. Generally, phenomenology is defined as “the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view” (Smith, 2018, para. 1). This definition encompasses the study of the phenomena that are experienced by the mind as well as the study of the experience of consciousness itself. The birth of the modern phenomenological tradition is usually attributed to Edmund Husserl who strived to study the essential structures of consciousness and who established the bracketing (epoché) phenomenological method. Martin Heidegger, Husserl’s student, built upon his teacher’s insights but instead was a proponent of an interpretative phenomenology. Other phenomenologists who followed

offered novel contributions to phenomenological theory. These philosophers included Alfred Schutz (social phenomenology), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (phenomenology of perception), and Jean-Paul Sartre (existentialist phenomenology), among others.

Given the broad definition of phenomenology and the many directions it has been taken by philosophers during the modern era, it has been liberally applied in qualitative methods with the result that phenomenology and qualitative methods have become closely intertwined. Brinkmann, Jacobsen, and Kristiansen (2014) note that phenomenology

can be used in to encompass almost all forms of qualitative research. Phenomenology in the general sense is the study of *phenomena*—in other words, of the world as it appears to experiencing and acting human beings. A phenomenological approach will insist on taking human experience seriously, in whichever form it appears. (p. 22)

Likewise, phenomenology in information behaviour research, given the predominance of qualitative research, enjoys a similar silent ubiquity. Case (2016) notes that “[p]henomenological approaches are paramount among information behaviour researchers” (p. 208). However, the application of phenomenology within information behaviour and practice research varies from the direct application of Husserlian epoché on one end to a study merely being “inspired” by phenomenology on the other. Nevertheless, in a broad sense, the majority of information behaviour studies study the experiences of information seekers and users, albeit from the perspectives of the experiencers themselves, and thus are still worthy of the “phenomenology” moniker. Additionally, many influential information behaviour models and theories incorporate phenomenology as a key component or foundation of the model. These include Dervin’s Sense-Making (Dervin, 2003/1989a, p. 332). She writes that “Sense-Making starts with the fundamental assumption of the philosophical approach of phenomenology” (2003/1989a, p. 332). Chatman’s information poverty theory (1996) delved into the lived experiences of the working poor and influenced her subsequent ideas on ‘life in the round’ (1999) which explored the worldviews of female prisoners and their influence on their perception of information. Kuhlthau’s Information Search Process model desired to incorporate “affective experience as well as cognitive aspects” (Kuhlthau, 2004, p. 7) while Wilson (2016) credits phenomenologist Alfred Schutz’s ideas on social

phenomenology as part of his general information behaviour model. Lastly, Savolainen's (2008) information practices model also draws heavily from social phenomenology.

As was noted previously the hermeneutic phenomenology of Martin Heidegger will figure prominently in this dissertation. This is not the first time that Martin Heidegger's work has been used extensively in LIS. At the same time, there are few substantial uses of Heidegger by LIS scholars in general. Some scholars (Rieger, 2010; Kallinikos, Aleksi, & Martin, 2010) who have invoked Heidegger's name and ideas seem to do so as a sort of rhetorical device in their concluding statements to give an appearance the discourse remains open on the topics discussed in their articles by addressing them on a "grander" philosophical level. Others merely mention that Heidegger was instrumental to the development of phenomenology (e.g. Bawden, 2006; Curras, 2002; Hicks, Dattero, & Gallup, 2007; Jie, Xinning, & Sanhong, 2008).

There are, of course, some LIS scholars who have engaged with Heidegger in a substantial way. Budd (1995) argues that the field of LIS should rely upon hermeneutic phenomenology (via Heidegger, especially) as a foundation of thought and inquiry in LIS instead of positivism as this foundation incorporates the intentionality and unpredictability of human actors and counters the "determinism that is inherent in a positivist approach to research" (p. 315). Cass (1998) examines the potential of Heidegger's existential analysis to the current information age and then discusses in depth Heidegger's idea of fallenness and how the world wide web may contribute to this state. Capurro (2000) employs Heidegger's thinking on the structure of understanding to demonstrate how the information-seeking process is a process that involves an interaction between two structures of understanding (or hermeneutics): the structures arising from the contexts of the information-seeking individual and the structures arising from the contexts of the people who store and classify information. As a sort of introduction to the interplay between Heidegger and LIS, Day's (2010) work proposes that Heidegger's thinking can be potentially fruitful to understanding the idea of the information society, particularly through Heidegger's thinking on "language, technology, identity, and community within the context of Heidegger's critique of the Western metaphysical tradition and modernity" (p. 174). Tkach (2017) critiques Belkin's Anomalous States of Knowledge model, Dervin's Sense-Making, and Kuhlthau's Information Search Process



model with Heidegger's ideas about the human being as Dasein, as Being-in-the world. He attests that these models fail to account for the situatedness of the information-seeker and rely too heavily on the assumption that the information-seeker and information are distinct objects. He argues instead, that when these concepts are examined in a philosophically robust way, this distinction breaks down. This dissertation picks up on many of the threads that these scholars have begun to unravel. Notably, this dissertation will also examine the ideas of fallenness, critique information behaviour and practice models and offer more evidence for the breakdown between the information-seeker and information itself.

Phenomenology has also enjoyed dialogue with Buddhist philosophy and psychology in modern times. Like western philosophical phenomenology, Buddhism is ultimately concerned with the structures of consciousness and the experiences of the objects that appear to consciousness. Garfield (1995) writes,

Phenomenology is central to Buddhist thought, because in the end, Buddhism is about the transformation of the way we experience the world. It begins with an analysis of how ordinary beings take up with the world, and how that engenders suffering. Buddhist analysis continues with an account of the cognitive and intentional structures that constitute that mode of comportment. The whole point of that analysis is to conclude with an account of how they can be transformed so as to enable us to experience the world without engendering suffering. And of course, that requires an account of what the structure of such a consciousness would be. (p. 179)

Garfield furthers that Buddhist phenomenological thought and practice is a type of “deep phenomenology” which is “the inquiry into the fundamental cognitive, affective, and perceptual processes that underlie and which are causally or constitutively--biologically or metaphysically--responsible for those we find in introspection” (p. 180) which is also what Garfield claims was the pursuits of Western philosophical phenomenologists such as Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre and de Beauvoir (p. 180). This is compared to “surface” phenomenology which seeks to merely describe the “naive” and accessible first-person perspective. Wallace (2008) provides more detail into how this “deep” phenomenological method looks in practice:

The core approach of Buddhist psychology involves a combination of meditative contemplation, which can be described as phenomenological inquiry; empirical



observation of motivation, as manifested through emotions thought patterns and behavior, and critical philosophical analysis. (p. 165)

The Buddhist phenomenological methods that Wallace describes would be of interest to information behaviour researchers since they are often interested in these phenomena in the minds and activities of information seekers and users.

In the practice of Buddhism, there are specific scriptures that describe the nature of the mind. These are called *Lōrig*. The term derives from the Tibetan “Lō” meaning “awareness” and “rig” meaning “knowledge” (Tsering, 2006). The *Lōrig* teachings are classified as part of the *Abhidharma*, a traditional division of Buddha’s teachings wherein the nature of the mind and reality are discussed<sup>6</sup>. The *Lōrig* teachings form an introduction to the mind from a Buddhist perspective. The *Lōrig* text that will be relied upon almost exclusively in the dissertation is Geshe Kelsang Gyatso’s *How to Understand the Mind* (2014).<sup>7</sup> The book begins by explaining the primary minds of the sense awarenesses and the fifty-four mental factors (or parts of the mind) that accompany the primary minds and how these function together to create conscious experience. The work explains how to harness each mental factor for the practice of Buddha’s teachings and for the transformation of the mind. The second half of the work investigates Buddhist epistemology (*pramāṇa*) and the different types of valid and invalid cognition.

Higgins (2012) notes that, with Buddhism, “the association that arises with greatest persistence is with phenomenology, and its key figure, Martin Heidegger, in particular” (p. 123). While Buddhist thought has enjoyed some usage with the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (Park & Kopf, 2009), Heidegger’s thinking and Buddhist psychology and philosophy have enjoyed a particularly long collaboration beginning in the 1920s with Japanese students studying philosophy in Germany under Heidegger (Davis, 2013, p. 462). This dialogue between these two systems of thought occurred during Heidegger’s life (Heidegger died in 1976) and is not merely a post-hoc interaction between these two

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<sup>6</sup> The other divisions are the *Sūtras*, discourses of Buddha and the *Vinaya*, the rules of monastic discipline.

<sup>7</sup> Weaver and Nyima (2019) notes that what is unique about Gyatso’s *Lōrig* text as compared to others is that it is written from a Mādhyamika-Prasaṅgika view while traditional *Lōrig* texts are composed from the Svatantrika view (p. 2).

systems of thought. Davis writes, “At various other times Heidegger expressed similar enthusiasm about the resonances between his own thought and that of Buddhism” (p. 465). During his lifetime, Heidegger interacted with Kyoto (Zen) school philosopher Nishitani Keiji and D. T. Suzuki (famous for making Zen popular in the United States) both in-person and through their writing.

More generally, Heidegger had “considerable interest in Asian thought” (Parkes, 1987, p. 5) and also demonstrated “a lifelong interest in engaging in such a dialogue [between and Eastern and Western thought]” (Davis, 2013, p. 459). In addition to Zen Buddhism, Heidegger was also interested in Daoist thought. There are some scholars that posit that Asian, and in particular Buddhist thought was an uncredited and “profound” influencer (Davis, 2013, p. 460) of Heidegger’s thought.

Hashi (2015) writes that Buddhism and Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology are linked primarily because their fundamental phenomenologies are similar:

Cognition in Buddhist philosophy is never separated from the phenomena of real things in the empirical world. This point of view enables us to compare Dōgen [Zen Buddhism] and Heidegger. Heidegger postulates that phenomenology is a method of investigation which shows itself openly, and which is obvious in itself. His phenomenology expresses a maxim, pointing “to the things themselves!” (p.112)

Dallmayr (1993) expands from this point by noting the two most popular avenues of focus at the intersection of Buddhist and Heideggerian thought: “the themes of nothingness or emptiness and of ‘thinghood’ seen as a ‘gathering’ of being” (p. 202). These two avenues focus on the nature of reality, and subsequently of entities, as described by these two systems of thought. Other notable forays into the intersection of Buddhist and Heideggerian thought include Umehara (1970) who compared the concepts of death and impermanence in both systems of thought as part of answering the larger question of whether man can “secure his existence in a civilization without God” (p. 272). Khong (2003) compares the concepts of openness and non-self; letting be and letting go; and fourfold and inter-relatedness from a psychological perspective. In particular, Khong believes that “Although Heidegger enunciates a more meditative way of relating to the world, he has not articulated techniques for cultivating it” (p. 107), which is where Buddhism is particularly helpful. Finally, Batchelor (1983) attempts to describe

Buddhism using the existential language of Heidegger in a manner inspired by theologian Paul Tillich's *Systematic Theology* (1951, 1957, 1963). The work describes how Buddhism can be understood as "an answer" to the problems of existence. In particular, he describes how many Buddhist concepts such as the Four Noble Truths and refuge and compassion serve as this answer. Despite bringing in many aspects of Buddhism into his existential analysis, noticeably absent is discussion about karma and rebirth. This work by Batchelor will serve as an important text in the discussion and analysis portions of the dissertation.

## 2.5 Research on the New Kadampa Tradition

The NKT has been featured in some research within the field of Religious Studies. However, there has not been much examination of the NKT beyond this field, so this dissertation would be among the first contributions outside of Religious Studies. Among the notable inclusions to this research include Kay's article (1997), written shortly after the controversy surrounding Dorje Shugden began which sought to provide a larger context to the development of the NKT and the practice of Dorje Shugden for Western readers. As such, Kay (1997) relates the development of the NKT by discussing the recent history of its 'parent' tradition, the Gelug sect of Tibetan Buddhism and its "historical and contemporary divisions" (p. 278) that provided a space for the NKT to form. In particular, he relates the story of Kelsang Gyatso's arrival in England at Manjushri Institute as a part of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), Gyatso's subsequent dissatisfaction with the FPMT's leadership, the development of the NKT in 1991 and then the crystallization of the different aspects of the tradition. Kay then outlines the Dorje Shugden debate and its main 'players', particularly noting the role of NKT in the ongoing Dorje Shugden controversy with a focus on the political and theological arguments employed by the NKT against the Dalai Lama's ban.

Danyluk's (2002) study explores the complexity of the Western Buddhist identity and Western Buddhist practice and tries to dislodge conceptions of them as large, institutional, and unwavering. Her study in particular seeks to examine these from a feminist perspective to uncover the Western Buddhist woman's identity and practice. Danyluk engaged in personal interviews with attendees of four Toronto Tibetan Buddhist

centres, one of which was the Toronto NKT temple. Danyluk sought to collect their experiences of these locales and their practice within them. Speaking about the NKT, Danyluk describes the temple and its programs. She also describes the practitioners there as conforming to Nattier's categorization of 'elite' Buddhists (that is, being white, European, upper middle class, with some post-secondary education) (Nattier, 1997, p. 75 in Danyluk, 2002, p. 45) and that they made the move to Buddhism because of an attraction to a sense of tradition (rather than on one's own) and because they were adverse to traditional forms of Western religion and Western culture (p. 76).

Cozort's (2003) essay examines the educational programs of two Western Tibetan Buddhist organizations, the FPMT and the NKT and compares them to their model, the curriculum for the "geshe" degree (commonly made analogous to a doctorate in Buddhist studies) that are awarded after completing a monastic education. Since the founders of these Western traditions, Lama Yeshe and Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, were both educated at Sera Je Monastery in Tibet (now re-established in India after the Chinese invasion), it is used as the model against which the comparisons are made.

Cozort then outlines the core educational programs in the FPMT, the Basic Program and the Masters Program, and outlines the different subjects and their companion texts. This is followed by a similar explanation of the NKT's Foundation Program and Teacher Training Program subjects and texts. Cozort (2003) notes that while there are some similarities, both the FPMT and NKT skip some subjects that traditionally Tibetan monks have spent many years studying (p. 236) such as debating and the Vinaya (monastic discipline). What is added to these Western programs that is not featured in the traditional monastic education is theory and preparatory meditations for the practice of Buddhist tantra. Cozort (2003) concludes, "All in all, the NKT and FPMT programs respond to the desires of Western Dharma students, who feel that Buddhism is mainly about meditation, who want their philosophy mixed with practice, and who want to progress as quickly as possible toward the higher tantric teachings" (p. 237).

A study by Silver, Ross & Francis (2012) reports on the "Jungian psychological type of New Kadampa Buddhists" in Canada. The Jungian psychological types form the basis of the popular Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Questionnaires were distributed in person and via mail. Silver, Ross, & Francis found that Kadampa Buddhists in Canada "show clear

preferences for introversion (68%), for intuition (68%), and for judging (71%). There is a balance between preferences for feeling (52%) and for thinking (48%)...the most frequently occurring complete types are INFJ (19%) and ISTJ (19%)” (p. 1061). While the sample size is small (n = 31), the authors make the conclusion that the psychological types typical of Kadampa Buddhists reflect their religious behaviour. For example, the predominantly introspective orientation of Kadampa Buddhists in the sample explains how they “explore the inward path and promote time for meditation, quiet contemplation, and solitude”, “encourage a personal quest” and “find their own path and to engage in hermeneutical dialogue with spiritual beliefs and practices” (Silver, Ross, & Francis, 2012, p. 1063).

The most recent, and arguably most comprehensive, study of the NKT is a doctoral dissertation by Emory-Moore (2019). Using a variety of methods (ethnographic observation, content analysis, and interviews), Emory-Moore studied the tradition in the American and Canadian contexts. With the NKT being a novel and controversial new religious movement, his focus is understanding the NKT’s labour force of individuals remunerated at subsistence levels and how it adapts or troubles the traditional householder/renunciant division present in traditional forms of Tibetan Buddhism. He offers that the tradition’s “missionary monasticism” is a factor in its growth and success, but also the source of some of its problems.

## 2.6 Chapter summary

This chapter reviewed the research literature which situates this study. It began by summarizing relevant information behaviour studies related to religion and spirituality that focus on work-related and person-centred perspectives. It also introduced spiritual everyday life information behaviour studies such as the work of Finnish scholar Jarkko Kari on the paranormal, and ELIS studies which could be considered “beyond” everyday life. It also briefly introduced Dervin’s Sense-Making methodology and reviewed those spiritual information behaviour studies which make use of it. Next, the forthcoming analysis was also provided some context through an introduction to phenomenology in information behaviour and in Buddhism. Context was also provided as to the lengthy relationship between Buddhist and Heideggerian thought. It finished with a small amount of research on the NKT, the Buddhist religious tradition which is a focus and

context of this study. The next chapter will outline the guiding principles of the study as well as provide specifics on the methods of inquiry used to both collect data and perform the analysis.

## Chapter 3

### 3 Methodology

Four research questions emerged in response to the literature review and out of the curiosity of the author. This chapter outlines the empirical methods by which these four research questions were investigated through empirical and analytical methods. The chapter begins with a presentation of these four questions. Then, the chapter offers the philosophical and methodological standpoints from which this research was conducted. Two empirical methods were used to investigate the four research questions: a qualitative content analysis of a Buddhist text and twenty semi-structured interviews with Kadampa Buddhist practitioners. The methods used in the qualitative content analysis are presented first, beginning with a justification of the text used, followed by an explanation of data collection methods, and of the analytical method used. This is followed by a presentation of the methods of the semi-structured interviews, beginning with sampling information, recruitment procedure, data collection, and finally the analytical methods. A non-empirical method was also used primarily in Chapter 5 in the analysis and discussion of the empirical findings. This method, textual analysis, is also introduced.

#### 3.1 Research questions

The literature review functioned to reveal gaps in the literature, notably the lack of spiritual everyday life information practices, and also the lack of Buddhist perspectives. It also provides context for the analysis in Chapter 5 through introducing phenomenology in the information behaviour literature, Buddhism, and Heidegger and their triangulations. The first two research questions derive from frequently asked questions in information behaviour research, while the last two are meant to dig deeper into the connections and implications of this research. The research questions are as follows. Also included is some justification and explanation for these questions.

*RQ1: What are the everyday life spiritual information practices of Buddhists of the New Kadampa Tradition?*

The results of the exploration of this first research question will be an inventory, as well as a detailed description, of the information practices of New Kadampa Buddhists that

arise from the texts and practitioners of the tradition. It will attempt to be comprehensive, covering different aspects of everyday Buddhist practice. In particular, there is a need to explore, in greater detail, the information practices that are not already part of the normal “repertoire” of information practices. With the use of the profound context of religion and spirituality, it is hoped that the findings derived from this question will expand the notions of what is considered information and/or information practices. Finally, this research question is meant to continue in the same tradition of the studies already established within the study of religious information behaviours which sought to discover and describe information behaviours in a simple and straightforward manner.

*RQ2: Do existential questions or concerns drive New Kadampa Buddhists to seek Dharma information?*

This question seeks to probe into the so-called “information needs” of New Kadampa Buddhists. In addition to inventorying the questions and concerns that drive Kadampa Buddhists to seek spiritual information, this question also explores how the profound or spiritual context might change the way information scholars think about information needs.

*RQ3: Is a Dharma realization an outcome of the use of Dharma information?*

This research question seeks to study in more detail information use and its effects within a Buddhist context. How are Kadampa Buddhists using spiritual information and what effects are they experiencing from engaging in Dharma practice? Does, and if so, how does information result in the soteriological goal of Buddhism? Do existing ELIS theories adequately explain the information use of New Kadampa Buddhists? Is there any evidence of a new explanation?

*RQ4: Are spiritual information behaviours and practices best understood and conceptualized as part of everyday life information practices?*

This research question seeks to challenge the boundaries of ELIS as a consequence of bringing it into a religious context. In what ways do spiritual information practices not fit into existing ELIS theories due to the profundity of spiritual practices as well as their potential lifelong duration?



## 3.2 Philosophical assumptions

This study was conducted within a naturalistic framework. Naturalistic inquiry is a paradigm of inquiry that is frequently used in the social sciences as it is more appropriate than rationalistic or scientific frameworks for the study of people within their contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1982). The naturalistic paradigm, or way of looking at and studying the world, is comprised of a set of axioms concerning the nature of reality, the relationship between the inquirer and the respondent and the nature of the truth statements within this paradigm. Within the naturalistic paradigm, the nature of reality is not universal, absolute and independent as it is in a rationalistic paradigm, but is rather “multiple, divergent, [and] holistic” (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 237). It is multiple because each respondent has a unique interpretation or way of looking at the world based on individual experiences and thus respondents are potentially divergent from each other. These realities are also holistic because they must be studied as a whole as “to disassociate the wholes is to alter them radically” (Lincoln & Guba, 1982, p. 237).

Unlike the rationalistic paradigm which purports to place the inquirer at a distance from his or her object of study, the inquirer/respondent relationship within the naturalistic paradigm is one of interdependence as “the inquirer and the object interact to influence one another” (Lincoln & Guba, 1982, p. 238). As such, the researcher and his or her experiences are an important aspect of this type of inquiry (more on this below).

Finally, given that it is impossible to separate the context from the object of study within the naturalistic paradigm, truth statements are “idiographic, context-bound working hypotheses [that] focus on differences” (Lincoln & Guba, 1982, p. 237) and thus are not meant to be generalizable nomothetic truth statements as they are in a rationalistic paradigm. An aim is for the potential transferability of naturalistic findings to similar contexts rather than the generalization of a sample to the whole population. In short, a goal that stems from these axioms is the establishment of intersubjectivity, which is “the process by which humans share common experiences and subscribe to shared

understandings of reality” (Armstrong, 2010, p. 883) as a means of seeking knowledge and truth.

In a general sense the naturalistic paradigm is commensurate with Buddhist metaphysics. While the study was not explicitly conducted within a Buddhist paradigm, Buddhist metaphysics does inform the authors’ own way looking at the world which is relevant to the concept of researcher as research instrument. Furthermore, this paradigm was also shared by some participants in the study. In particular, the naturalistic paradigm is similar to the teachings of the Mādhyamaka-Prāsangika school founded by Nāgārjuna (c. 150-250 CE) and expounded upon by his later disciple Candrakīrti (c. 600-650 CE). Madhyamikas teach that phenomena lack inherent or absolute existence from their own side, by their own power, or from a permanent, unchanging essence. Rather, phenomena are dependent-related in that they rely upon their parts, their causes, their name, their basis of imputation and their imputation by conception; no phenomena can be found existing independent of these. The implications of this is that each individual experiences a unique reality because every individual has a mind (cf. multiple realities of naturalistic inquiry). Furthermore, other individuals that appear to the mind are dependently related to the mind perceiving them (cf. interdependent inquirer/respondent relationship). Truths within this paradigm are also context driven as they can be whatever is appropriate to the situation of the individual as a convention (cf. idiographic truths).

### 3.2.1 Researcher as research instrument

Armstrong (2010) writes that “naturalistic inquiry relies upon the researcher’s own subjective experiences in conjunction with other data and evidence as a necessary component of creating interpretations of world” (p. 880). Thus, the author recognizes and fully supports his role as an active instrument and fundamental component of this research. He also recognizes the power of his own individual interpretation of reality in the creation of knowledge within the naturalistic paradigm, a paradigm which Guba & Lincoln (1982) note, that “[takes] advantage of the not inconsiderable power of the human-as-instrument” (p. 235). Demonstrating the interpretive power of the individual, Corbin & Strauss (2008) instruct the researcher to rely upon a sense of “feeling right” when the findings of the research accurately reflect the essence of the phenomena studied

(p. 47). Furthermore, Guba & Lincoln (1988, p. 94) suggest minimizing the “distance or objective separateness between himself or herself and those being researched” (in Creswell, 2013, p. 20), rather than increasing it as the suggestion would be within a rationalistic paradigm. Therefore, the author’s pre-existing epistemological assumptions for this project concern his status as an insider within the community to which the research texts and participants belong, namely the NKT. The author possesses, according to Merton (2006), “a priori intimate knowledge of the community and its members” (in Roland & Wicks, 2009, p. 253) through his active involvement with the NKT.

Furthermore, it is asserted that the author’s insider status within the NKT is necessary to perform this study, not only in terms of ease of collecting data for the study, but in the interpretation and discussion of the results. Because of his familiarity with the texts, hermeneutical traditions, and practices of the tradition, he has intimate access to the worldviews and practices of the NKT and is able to see more clearly than an outsider their nature and function in relation to the information phenomena that are of interest here. The intention of the dissertation is not to provide an empirically distant ethnographic study of religious practices. Nor is it the intention of the author to actively promote the NKT over other Buddhist traditions or other religious traditions.

To offer insight into the author’s insider status, a brief story of his encountering of Buddhism in his adolescence and early adulthood is offered. The author met Buddhism in 2002 while he was in secondary school. The author was raised in the United Church of Canada (a mainline Protestant reformed denomination of Christianity), but had difficulty with Christianity’s teachings on homosexuality and the logical consequences of the existence of an omnipotent and omniscient being. After he had left the Church in 2001 or so, the author searched online for Buddhist groups in his hometown. Resources like this were scant at this time on the internet, but he found a mention of a Tibetan Buddhist group led by a former monk of Gampo Abbey in Nova Scotia, called Nyingje Companions. It was here that the author learned how to meditate, engage in mantra recitation, and engage in sadhana (*sādhana*) that did not require any initiations (*abhiṣeka*). He took refuge in a formal ceremony in 2002. In 2005, the author moved away from his hometown to pursue an undergraduate degree and subsequently fell out of his regular practice of Buddhism. However, late in the pursuit of the undergraduate

degree, he began anew a dedicated practice. In 2011, he returned to his hometown to pursue graduate studies and again sought out a Buddhist sangha to become affiliated with. He found a branch of the NKT and quickly became immersed in the regular teachings and activities provided by the centre. In May 2015, he was ordained as a Buddhist monk in the NKT.

This insider status within the NKT offered many benefits to the author. Fontana and Frey (2000) propose understanding the language and culture of respondents and gaining trust and establishing rapport with respondents as necessary components to successful interviews (pp. 654-56). The insider status of the author provided relatively easy access to these participants. He was familiar with Buddhist religious terminology that participants used as well as the ‘vocabulary’ and idioms commonly used in Kadampa Dharma centres.

While some may consider this insider status as problematic because it leads to problems of over-rapport with participants or an inability to bracket out the researcher’s assumptions and experiences of the phenomena, it is instead asserted that the notion of “validity requires intimacy” (Palys & Atchison, 2008, p. 10) outweighs these problems. However, a degree of self-reflexivity is required of the researcher to be constantly examining these beliefs and assumptions at every stage of the research process (Hellawell, 2006). Roland and Wicks (2009) suggest conducting an exit survey soon after interviews are completed to evaluate the “recognized value of the insider status of the researcher” (p. 254) by the participant. In lieu of an exit survey, interview participants were asked at the end of the interview whether the insider status of the author within the NKT helped or hindered the participants’ ability to share and describe their experiences.

Every single participant noted that the author’s being a member of the NKT benefited them in their interviews. Some noted that they would not have participated if the author had not been a Kadampa. Michelle noted “I would never talk about it with someone who isn’t a Kadampa because he may not understand or misunderstand stuff.” When pressed for the reasons how or why the author’s being a Kadampa benefited them during the interview process, participants noted that the author understood the “language” of the NKT. They were not required to provide a lot of explanation about Buddhist

ideas. Lindsay noted that “you kn[ew] what I was talking about.” Carla noted “I had a feeling that you were understanding better what I was saying,” and Greg said “We’re understanding a similar language. It would take a long time to explain some concepts to someone who has not studied this lineage.” They also reported feeling trust and confidence which allowed them to be very open and honest about their responses to the interview questions. Vanessa said: “It helped that you are a monk. It makes it easier. I have no boundaries. I feel that I can have confidence with you.” Amanda noted: “I haven’t had to censor anything that I’ve been saying. If you weren’t a Kadampa, or a fellow practitioner, there might have been some caution on my part about what I was saying, I wouldn’t have been so open.” Two participants also noted some downsides. One, a research scholar, recognized the “potential issues” with over-rapport in qualitative work and one participant was also slightly taken aback at the beginning with the conversational nature of semi-structured interviews. However, they both also agreed that the insider experience was overall positive.

Finally, again while not explicitly conducted as such, the project was conducted in the spirit of heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990) which investigates personal, but universal or social issues through the lens of personal transformation of the researcher. The author undertook this research with the intention of it being a part of his own personal spiritual practice, as a method to deepen his understanding and experience of the Dharma and its practice, and as an opportunity to benefit others.

### 3.3 Methodological standpoint

The dissertation explores the whole information journey of a Kadampa Buddhist, from an initial state of need or desire, through the process of finding information, to putting that information to practice in a comprehensive manner and experiencing the results and effects of those practices. Therefore, there was a need to employ two research methods to more accurately capture these practices and experiences of the research participants.

The overarching methodological approach to the thesis is one that is *guided* by grounded theory which is “a qualitative research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, an action, or an interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants” (Creswell, 2013, p. 83). Despite this definition, the goal of

the project was primarily exploratory and descriptive in nature. The use of grounded theory as a methodological basis for the dissertation is to act as an empirical tether for the results and discussion sections of the dissertation which incorporates textual analysis of LIS, Heideggerian and Buddhist writings. In particular, grounded theory's approach to data collection and analysis is useful for collecting a wide range of qualitative data in order to better understand these phenomena and their potential interactions better. Corbin & Strauss (1990) write that "data for a grounded theory can come from various sources...anything that may shed light on questions under study" (p. 5). This study employed a multi-method approach to capture information behaviours and practices of New Kadampa Buddhists. The first method involved collecting textual accounts of information behaviours and practices through a qualitative content analysis of a text while the second method involved collecting experiential or phenomenological data through interviews to explore the informational nature of actual Dharma practice. Collectively, these methods allowed for the exploration of a wider variety of spiritual information phenomena within this Buddhist population than either method alone would allow. The first method that was used was a qualitative content analysis of a comprehensive Buddhist religious text that is employed by New Kadampa Buddhists. The religious text that was subject to study describes or outlines the "ideal" information behaviours of New Kadampa Buddhists as they derive from a spiritual and cognitive authority of the population under study. Despite their "ideal" status, the text chosen is meant to be prescriptive for Buddhists of the NKT. It outlines practices that should be engaged in.

Data not available from the content analysis about spiritual information behaviours and practices, such as stories of motivations, lived experiences of their practice, and personal interpretations of Buddhist teachings were also needed to provide a fuller picture of the behaviours and practices that were mentioned in the qualitative content analysis of a text. To capture these elements, semi-structured interviews were used. In qualitative studies, the credibility and validity of the study is enhanced through triangulation of, amongst other things, data, theoretical perspectives, and methodologies (Denzin, 1978 as cited in Konecki, 2008, p. 15). Therefore, a multi-method approach provided an opportunity to increase these desired qualities. In particular, the qualitative content analysis of a text and the interviews functioned together to: (1) provide multiple data sources from which

to draw upon a larger range of possible information behaviours and practices that can be accounted for in the study; (2) provide more fodder for analysis (“more pieces for the puzzle”); (3) aid each other as providing a basis for the analysis; and finally (4) provide a basis for comparison between ideal information behaviours and practices outlined in the text and actual enacted behaviours derived from the interviews.

### 3.4 Qualitative content analysis of text

The qualitative content analysis of a Buddhist text was conducted largely following instructions and advice from Krippendorff (2013).

#### 3.4.1 Qualitative content analysis sample

The text that was chosen to be subject to a qualitative content analysis was *Joyful Path of Good Fortune* (Tharpa Publications, 1995) authored by Geshe Kelsang Gyatso. The text is a substantial (approximately 650 pages) and comprehensive work on the Buddhist path to enlightenment. It outlines all of the stages of the path in a systematic way called *Lamrim*, a presentation of Buddha’s teachings created by the tenth century Buddhist scholar Atisha (982-1054 CE). The work is subtitled: “the complete Buddhist path to Enlightenment” so it was assumed that it would contain all of the information behaviours and practices that are required for an individual to progress on the Kadampa Buddhist path to its end. Gyatso’s work in particular was appropriate to study because he is the founder and former Spiritual Director of the NKT. Many of his disciples consider him to be their Spiritual Guide or “Guru” (meaning “teacher”). Therefore, it was also assumed that his disciples would engage in the spiritual information behaviours and practices that he prescribes.

Because of the insider status of the author, this text is being considered as an authoritative text that has the ability to accurately and authentically portray the information practices of New Kadampa Buddhists. Also, as will be shown below, some of the interview participants also consider this to be an important text in their spiritual practice. One could accuse the author of being unduly influenced by the normative nature of Gyatso’s spiritual authority manifesting through this text, but again the positionality of the author within the NKT is required for making robust findings. Furthermore, the text can also be viewed as authoritative within the context of the larger *Gelug* tradition with which the



NKT shares much of its history and thinking. For example, the text bears similarity in structure and content to other extensive works on Lamrim such as Pabongkhapa Dechen Nyingpo's *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* (Pabongkha Rinpoche, 2006; based on a discourse given in 1921) and Je Tsongkhapa's *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* (Tib: *Lamrim Chenmo*) (Tsongkhapa, 2014).

### 3.4.2 Qualitative content analysis units of analysis

The unit of analysis of the content analysis of a text component of the study is an instance of a perceived information behaviour or practice by the researcher present in the text. Krippendorff (2013) calls these units of analysis “thematic distinctions” (p. 108) and describes them as units that use the meaning of the content rather than surface features, such as presence of the word or syntax, as the basis for analysis. Since, within the Buddhist community, spiritual information practices are not expressly understood as such, the limits of such units rely upon the researcher and his experience and expertise in the study of information behaviour. Additionally, to aid in this delimitation, Savolainen (2008) defines an information practice as “a set of socially and culturally established ways to identify, seek, use, and share the information available in various sources” (p. 2). It could be easily argued that Buddhist information practices, while not always applicable to larger social or cultural contexts, are valid for communities of Buddhists. Gyatso, as a cognitive authority within the NKT, outlines ‘ideal’ Buddhist information practices that disciples should take up themselves. In particular, units of analysis were selected if they were an instance of any sort of interaction with, or use of, documents or instructions within this set of texts. In some instances, these were identified through the presence of words such as “Dharma”, “teaching”, “instruction”, or “text” but many relied upon the author’s intuition and experience of the Buddhist path and to recognize the behaviours and practices. Since the unit of analysis was defined by the theme or content of the particular instance of an information practice, the units of analysis were of varying lengths from a sentence fragment to a paragraph and sometimes contained more than one instance of an information practice. However, since one of the research questions of this study is not merely to create a quantified list of occurrences of these information practices, but also to explore how these information practices are used “in real life,” the



presence of more than one information practice interacting with another is more helpful in determining their relationship to one another.

### 3.4.3 Qualitative content analysis procedure

A copy of *Joyful Path of Good Fortune* was procured and was read from front to back in order. The few pages that were omitted from analysis were front and end matters such as title pages as well as the index. However, the foreword, acknowledgements, and introduction section were included as part of the analyzable text since it was originally supposed that they might contain mentions of information behaviours and practice given their length of a few pages each.

Since at the time of the data collection the title was not available as an electronic book, any instances of information behaviours and practices were copied by type-writing them by hand into the data collection instrument (a word processing document dedicated to the task containing a large table). See Table 1 below for the layout of the data collection instrument. Included is a very small selection from the data as an example of the procedure.

| ID | Direct Quotation   | Page Reference | Theme / Type of IB  | Memos / Notes                                       |
|----|--|----------------|---|---|
| 8  | “Whenever a Spiritual Guide teaches Dharma”  | p.3            | Teaching information/Dharma   | Important that only Sp. Guide is teaching?          |
| 10 | "The mind of the student is pure if he or she is free from holding wrong views, has faith in the Spiritual Guide and in the Dharma that is taught, and has a correct motivation” | p. 3           | Requirements: Free from wrong views, Faith in Sp. Guide, Faith in Dhara, Correct motivation | Do these apply to all Dharma information practices? |
| 12 | “If we read Lamrim”  | p. 3           | Reading Dharma  |   |

### Table 1: Qualitative Content Analysis Instrument

In the table, each unit of analysis was given a unique identifier and the page number was noted from whence it was copied. A first attempt at defining the unit of analysis into a discrete information behaviour or practice, or into a theme related to information behaviours and practices, arising from the copied quotation followed, as well as any initial notes and memos. The reading of the text produced 308 mentions of spiritual information behaviours and practices or themes relevant to spiritual information behaviours and practices.

Quotations mentioning spiritual information behaviours and practices were selected according to the criteria mentioned in section 3.4.2. To reiterate, anything that the author considered vaguely reminiscent of information, informing, or any other informational phenomena was captured and placed into the data collection instrument from the text. Once the reading was complete, a list of codes (see Appendix D) arose from the collected quotations. A constant comparison method was then used to “establish boundaries of the categories, find negative evidence, discern conceptual similarities and...discover patterns” (Tesch, 1990, p. 96) of the initial coding framework and any other codes that arose from the analysis. The constant comparison method occurred in a separate word processing document and was completed by re-reading the list of quotations collected in the first word processing document. Quotations or segments of the quotations were again copied (this time via a computer’s text copying and pasting function) into the new document containing the list of codes which acted as a framework to reorganize the quotations into groups. Once all of the quotations from the original instrument had been imported into the new document, the actual comparison work began, facilitated by viewing all of the related quotations together under the headings listed in the codebook. The method revealed a final list of spiritual information behaviours and practices which is featured in the upcoming results sections. However, only a selection of quotations (best or clearest examples of each theme) were featured in the results.

A small pilot study employing this methodological procedure and analytical technique was conducted in March 2015, albeit with the transcription of an oral Dharma teaching (Chögyan, 2015) which had a running time of approximately 75 minutes rather than a published text.

## 3.5 Interviews

The second method that was used to collect data about Buddhists' information behaviours and practices was semi-structured interviews. Interviews are a common qualitative research method to gather information directly from individuals about their thoughts and personal experiences. Luo and Wildemuth (2009) report that “researchers often choose semi-structured interviews because they are aware that individuals understand the world in varying ways” (p. 233). Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to be more flexible than structured interviews in directing their inquiry in response to each participant's unique perspective and experiences and to the pace and tone of the interview conversation.

### 3.5.1 Interview sample inclusion criteria, sampling techniques, and sample size

The people that were the focus of the study were adult Buddhists who were at least eighteen years old at the time of data collection and who self-identified as members of the NKT. Self-identification by the informant was relied upon because it would have been very difficult (and invasive) to verify the membership status of participants with their centres in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom<sup>8</sup>. Relying on membership status would have also excluded those practitioners who consider themselves Kadampas but are not on a study program. Traditionally, one is defined as a Buddhist when one continuously goes for refuge to the Three Jewels—Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha—but this is an internal action and not easily identified externally. Interview participants were both lay and ordained members of the tradition (but due to the small number of ordained people and the geographical precision provided by this sample, exact numbers are not provided here). The NKT has over 1200 centres and meditation groups spanning the globe. However, the sample was restricted geographically to include participants only from the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada as these countries are generally culturally analogous and share a common history and language.

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<sup>8</sup> Membership in one of the NKT study programs (General Program, Foundation Program or Teacher Training Program) at an NKT centre was used by Emory-Moore (2019) as a manner of operationalizing membership in the NKT.

The NKT is comprised almost entirely of convert Buddhists who were raised in other religious traditions or no religious tradition. Although the NKT has centres in Asia (e.g. Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan), these Asian practitioners are more likely to have been raised within a Buddhist cultural context rather than have converted later in life.

A convenience sample was relied upon within the age and geographical delimitations. Interviews were conducted with practitioners who professed interest in participating in the study in person or by replying to the call for participants and letter of information. Participants also were required to have a certain degree of fluency in English in order to fully participate in the interview.

Twenty interviews were conducted in total, which was a number of interviews that appeared to be at a level of saturation to the author. Saturation occurs “when the collection of new data does not shed any further light on the issue under investigation” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967 in Mason, 2010). The sample size of twenty as a saturated sample generally accords with the guidance of other scholars such as Bertaux (1981), who notes that fifteen is the smallest acceptable sample, Creswell (1998), who suggests a sample size of twenty to thirty, and Green and Thorogood (2009) who relate that “little that is new comes out of transcripts after you have interviewed 20 or so people” (as cited in Mason, 2010). A limit of thirty participants was originally placed on the sample due to practical implications of analyzing such a quantity of data, and so that the project was completed in a timely manner.

### 3.5.2 Interview sample justification

The justification for the use of the NKT as the population for the sample is primarily based upon convenience. Since the author is a member of the NKT community, he had relatively easy access to participants both in person and in online communities. That being said, the choice of the NKT for the sample is also based on the tradition’s prevalence amongst Western Buddhist communities. The NKT is not a small sect of Western Buddhism. As was mentioned previously, the NKT is comprised of over 1200 centres and groups worldwide. While the exact numbers of adherents worldwide are unavailable, in the United Kingdom where the NKT was founded, Bluck (2006) notes that the NKT “has expanded more rapidly than any other Buddhist tradition” (p. 129) and

has an estimated 3,000 to 5,000 members in Britain (p. 16) representing fifteen to twenty percent of all British Buddhists (p. 14). In addition to this, recent estimates by Emory-Moore (2019) place the North American membership of the NKT at approximately 3,000. Additionally, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, the founder of the NKT, is a noteworthy figure of Western Buddhism and is a prolific writer, being an author of over twenty works on meditation and Buddhism.

### 3.5.3 Interview sample recruitment

Sample recruitment began in early May 2016 and ended in late August 2016. The author relied upon existing social networks within Kadampa community for recruiting participants. Participants were primarily recruited electronically (n = 16). The text of the recruitment poster (see Appendix A) was posted to the following large Facebook groups that comprise the Kadampa online communities: “Students and Followers of Geshe Kelsang Gyatso,” “Kadampa Perfection of Giving” and “New Kadampa Tradition”. Students and Followers of Geshe Kelsang Gyatso is a public Facebook group. It is an informal group not directly affiliated with the NKT. While the request did not exactly fit the definition of the prescribed activity in the group which “is to discuss the meaning of Geshe Kelsang's teachings and how we can practice them in our modern daily life”, there have been other occasions where a researcher has asked for participants in a project via this method. Kadampa Perfection of Giving and New Kadampa Tradition are both closed Facebook groups of which the author was a member at the time of recruitment. They are also informal groups not established by the tradition but by practitioners. The “New Kadampa Tradition” group is “an informal discussion group mostly based upon our experiences with Kadam Dharma” with which the nature of the research project is related as it is attempting to collect experiences of practicing Kadam Dharma. Furthermore, members of the group “Kadampa Perfection of Giving” would have the opportunity to practice giving their time and information to the project. Practicing giving is the intention behind the creation of this group. Interested individuals initiated contact with the author via direct personal messages on Facebook as well as through the comments sections on the posts. Participants who responded there were encouraged to send a private message or email instead. The author also posted once

to his own Facebook timeline to see if those Kadampa practitioners who are personal friends on Facebook would have liked to participate in the study.

Four participants were recruited informally in-person at NKT events in Canada between June and August 2016. These participants were not actively recruited but rather voluntarily expressed interest in participation after informal discussion of the research project. The author followed up with these participants through email and private social media messaging at a later date.

A single poster that was created for recruitment was posted, with permission of administrators, at Kadampa Meditation Centre Canada in Toronto on a bulletin board with other publicity, but no participants were successfully recruited via this method.

### 3.5.4 Sample characteristics

Not a great deal of demographic information was collected from interview participants. However, at the time of the interview, age, self-reported gender, country of residence, and years practicing Buddhism were characteristics that were collected at the beginning of the interview to give a sense of who these people are when they completed the interview. There was an attempt to balance the requirements of providing a satisfactory understanding of this sample while at the same time collecting as little identifying information as possible so that identities of the participants could be protected. The table below provides a summary of this information in the order that participants were interviewed in. Participants were provided with pseudonyms to protect their identity.

| Name     | Age | Gender | Years Practicing | Nationality |
|----------|-----|--------|------------------|-------------|
| Justin   | 40s | M      | 15               | Canada      |
| Nathan   | 38  | M      | 6                | Canada      |
| Madeline | 42  | F      | 8                | USA         |

|          |    |   |      |        |
|----------|----|---|------|--------|
| Steve    | 62 | M | 5    | USA    |
| Katrina  | 62 | F | 16   | USA    |
| Kelly    | 39 | F | 2    | USA    |
| Greg     | 42 | M | 15   | Canada |
| Kyle     | 39 | M | 15   | Canada |
| Josh     | 51 | M | 8    | USA    |
| Michelle | 25 | F | 1.5  | Canada |
| Prudence | 69 | F | 11   | Canada |
| Rachel   | 40 | F | 1    | USA    |
| Lindsay  | 52 | F | 3    | Canada |
| Vanessa  | 57 | F | 11   | Canada |
| Amanda   | 55 | F | 2    | UK     |
| Julia    | 56 | F | 17   | USA    |
| Carla    | 64 | F | 7    | Canada |
| Travis   | 57 | M | 1    | USA    |
| Jennifer | 53 | F | 11.5 | Canada |

|        |    |   |    |        |
|--------|----|---|----|--------|
| Joanne | 81 | F | 13 | Canada |
|--------|----|---|----|--------|

**Table 2: Characteristics of Interview Participants**

The sample was largely middle-aged with the median age being 53 years (the mean was 28 years old but is not a great indicator of central tendency here). The median years that these Kadampa Buddhists had practiced Buddhism was 8 years with a total range of yearly experience from 1 to 17 years. A slight majority of the interview sample was Canadian (n = 11) with American practitioners making up the next largest group in the sample (n = 8).

### 3.5.5 Interview procedure

First, a proposal was offered to the Non-Medical Research Ethics Board at Western University to engage in research with human subjects. After a successful review, permission was given to begin data collection for the dissertation project (see Appendix B). Interviews were conducted both electronically and in person. The sixteen Kadampa practitioners that were recruited electronically participated in the interview by Skype or FaceTime. The remaining four participants met with the author in person at a mutually agreed upon location to participate in the interview. Interviews were scheduled shortly after a successful recruitment occurred, so recruitment of participants and the actual interviews occurred parallel to each other. Interviews lasted on average approximately 46 minutes, with the shortest being 26 minutes and the longest 1 hour and 37 minutes. All of the electronic interviews were recorded with the internal microphone of a Macbook Air computer which adequately captured both the speaking person from the computer speakers as well as the “live” interviewer. The in-person interviews were recorded with a hand-held digital audio recorder. The digital audio files containing the interviews were saved to the personal computer of the author and will be permanently deleted after five years (in 2021) according to Western University policy.

Prior to the beginning of each interview, each participant was given a copy of the letter of information (see Appendix C) outlining what was involved in participating in the interview. Since many of the interview participants were geographically distant from the author, each participant was prompted to offer their verbal consent to participate in the



interview as well as prompted to offer their consent to allow the author to use direct quotations from the interview in the results sections of the dissertation. It was noted in the letter of information that some of the interview questions were of a deeply personal and existential nature which might invoke some emotional distress or anxiety.

Participants were instructed upon commencing the interview that they were free to not answer any questions that they do not feel comfortable answering or that they may take a small reprieve from answering questions at any time and that they have the freedom to end the interview at any time if they so wish without any negative consequence. However, none of the interview participants requested this.

The interviews were then transcribed by the author one at a time in the order that the participants were interviewed. Any identifying details that participants mentioned (including their name or location) were either omitted or substituted for a suitable pseudonym. It was noted in the letter of information to participants that the anonymized transcripts were to be kept for further research and teaching purposes.

### 3.5.5.1 Interview questions

The following was the list of questions that functioned as the backbone for the semi-structured interviews. In many cases, the author pressed participants for ‘critical incidents’ so that the interview data from participants was grounded in experience rather than their potential re-conceptualizations of those experiences (as far as this is possible). Luo and Wildemuth (2009) note that in particular that “using this technique can be particularly useful for gathering data about information behaviours” (p. 235).

#### **Establishing Rapport**

- Inquire how informant is doing.
- Plans for the weekend?
- How are things going at your centre?
- What do you have coming up at your centre?
- How long have you been practicing?

#### **Daily Dharma Practice**

- Describe your typical day and how you practice Dharma within it
- What formal practices do you do? Why?
- When do you find you're most successful at 'off-the-cushion' meditation? Not?
- What sources do you use for your practice of Dharma?
- Are there any incidents that you can share with me when you really needed Dharma?
- What problems do you encounter in your Dharma practice?
- Describe contemplation, how do you know when you have your meditation object?
- What are you reading right now? Why?

#### **Dharma as Social Practice**

- Do you ever look to other people for help in your practice? When?
- How are other people involved in your Dharma practice?
- When do you like to share Dharma?
- Describe the nature of the relationship with your Guru.

#### **Motivations for Dharma Practice**

- Why do you practice Dharma?
- Why did you come to the practice?
- Why do you continue to stay with the practice?
- Has your motivation or desire to practice Dharma changed?
- What are you seeking to change (about yourself?)
- How do you choose which Dharma instructions to go to?
- Why do you choose to go to Dharma over other things to solve your problems? Why not?
- When do you find you need Dharma the most?
- Do you ever feel like you don't need it? When?

- Are you concerned about death, a sense of meaninglessness, uncertainty?

### **Effects of Dharma Practice**

- How has the Dharma changed you?
- What about your experience has it changed?
- What do you notice about your world that is changed?
- Do you feel that you are different because of your practice? How?
- How are you different now?
- How is your mind different now?
- Do you interpret the world differently now that you practice Dharma? What do you attribute that to?
- Did you find what you're looking for?

### **Dharma, Information and Wisdom / Other**

- Is there anything else that you would like to add?
- Do you consider the Dharma to be information?
- If not, what do you think it is?
- Is the written text information, the oral words?
- Do you consider Dharma realizations to be information?
- How does it compare to more mundane types of information, like a recipe?
- What is wisdom?
- How do you know when you have wisdom?
- Did you feel that my being a Kadampa practitioner helped or hindered this interview?

This order of questions that was originally established above ended up not being the optimal order of questions. Corbin and Strauss (2008) note that data collection and analysis of that data are interrelated as each interview should guide the inquiry during the next data collecting session (p. 6). Instead, questions concerning motivation were often discussed first as this allowed the participants to tell their “Dharma story”, i.e., how they met Buddhist teachings, meditation, and the NKT in general. This provided a good basis

for discussing other aspects of their practice since the time that they had met Buddhism. Additionally, not all of the interview questions were asked in some interviews when it was evident to the interviewer that the participant had already provided satisfactory responses to those questions from the discussion that had naturally arisen.

### 3.5.6 Interview coding and analysis

Coding and analysis followed guidelines and advice from Corbin and Strauss (1990, 2008). Coding and analysis was initially done with the help of NVivo software as well as word processing software. Transcripts were analyzed one at a time. First, each one was read from beginning to end to get a sense of the whole experience of the interview from the perspective of the participant, or as a means “to enter vicariously into the life of participants” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 163). On the second read through, discrete thematic analytic units began to be identified as the transcripts were read through which involved brainstorming, making comparisons, reflecting on the data, and trying to understand its relations to other broader topics (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 193). In the NVivo software, these were highlighted and assigned to “nodes”. The first five or so interviews saw the creation of the most new nodes to which thematic units were assigned. As a basis for some of these original nodes, the author considered the results of the qualitative content analysis of *Joyful Path of Good Fortune* (completed earlier) which identified a variety of information behaviours and practices as well as other considerations for Buddhists’ information behaviours and practices. Of course, there were many themes that were derived directly from the interviews themselves, primarily around motivations and outcomes which were not easily capturable from the qualitative content analysis of the text. After each interview transcript had been read and a first-round thematic analysis had been completed, a second round of thematic analysis was conducted. Interview transcripts were again re-read with the purpose of capturing all of the themes that arose during the first round of analysis (the codebook arising from the first coding stage is available in Appendix E). After these two preliminary rounds of analysis, intra-thematic analysis was conducted. Excerpts from the interviews that were contained in the nodes were printed off and each node was analyzed using memoing and primarily involved the consolidation and condensation of the themes that were present in each node. At this point, the whole collection of nodes was organized into larger themes:

list of information practices, motivations, making-sense, outcomes, and cognitive authority. This was done to aid in the process of writing up the results.

### 3.6 Use of textual analysis in results and discussion

The forthcoming Chapter 4 is largely descriptive, outlining the empirical findings from the qualitative content analysis and interviews. The analytic method used in Chapter 4 consists of the content analysis of both *Joyful Path of Good Fortune* as well as the interviews to discover discrete categories of information behaviours and practices as outlined above. Chapter 5, on the other hand, is more conceptual. It builds on these empirical findings and attempts to connect together information needs, uses, and outcomes, provides discussion and analysis on the empirical findings presented in Chapter 4, and also enhances and critiques Dervin's Sense-Making metatheory. The backbone of the analysis is provided by Dervin's Sense-Making, but insights from both Buddhist philosophy and Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics are incorporated to reveal, explain, and elaborate on the metatheory (more specific reasons for the inclusion of these two lenses are outlined below). The analysis in Chapter 5 therefore also relies upon the methodology of *textual analysis* as a basis for contrasting and comparing the insights offered by each of the different perspectives.

Textual analysis is a methodology often employed in media, communication, or cultural studies. McKee (2003) defines it as "a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world" (p. 1). Texts are not strictly literary, nor document-bound, but can include a variety of other cultural products such as television programs, films, and art. Texts are "the material traces that are left of the practice of sensemaking--the only empirical evidence we have of how other people make sense of the world." (McKee, 2003, p. 15). Scholastic works clearly have this "textual" quality. They are an ossification of the sense-making of the researcher as they make truth claims about the world they are studying.

A variety of related texts were used for the analysis. In the textual analysis, Dervin's writing was represented by her 2003 reader comprised of her most impactful writing on Sense-Making. The Buddhist perspective was provided by Batchelor's *Alone with others: An existentialist approach to Buddhism* (1983) as well as a variety of texts from

Geshe Kelsang Gyatso's corpus of works. Batchelor's work is perhaps unrepresentative of "typical" Buddhist scholarship, but his work was chosen precisely because it is unconventional. Batchelor has displayed an ability over his career to present or reframe Buddhist ideas in new ways, as is evidenced in some of his other (more recent) works that interpret the Pāli Canon in a secular, modernist way. It is believed that the "bridging" or "transposing" or "translating" work that his writing does makes it easier for Buddhist ideas to interact with other systems of thought.

Heidegger's perspectives were offered by a number of "introductory" or reference works on Heidegger's philosophy as it is presented in *Being and Time* (1927/1962). A choice was made to rely on a number of Heidegger scholars instead of relying upon Heidegger's own words directly. The author felt more confident in relying upon the expertise (and subsequent authority) of these scholars to interpret Heidegger with more accuracy, especially given Heidegger's often difficult prose and the author's only nascent proficiency with Heidegger's writing. The primary goal of Heidegger's philosophy in this dissertation is to service the critique and enhancement of Dervin's Sense-making. Therefore, the requirement of making whatever use of his philosophy clear and understandable to a reader for this end hopefully outweighs the critiques of using Heidegger unconventionally.

Last, the empirical findings from the qualitative content analysis of *Joyful Path of Good Fortune* as well as the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews served as texts for the analysis as well. The texts were not used in a completely systematic way but were used as they were needed to make arguments about the interpretation of each text and the other texts. These interpretations were woven together into an analysis to fulfill the multiple aims of Chapter 5.

### 3.7 Chapter summary

This chapter began by introducing the four research questions that were to be investigated by empirical and analytic methods. This was followed by statements about the philosophical and methodological standpoints of the author. It then introduced and provided details on the two empirical methods used in the study, a qualitative content analysis of *Joyful Path of Good Fortune* and semi-structured interviews of 20 New

Kadampa Buddhists. Finally, the method of textual analysis was briefly introduced as it was used to enable the discussion and analysis forthcoming in Chapter 5. The next chapter begins the presentation of the results derived from the empirical investigation of the text and research participants.

## Chapter 4

### 4 Results, Part I: The informational nature of Kadampa Buddhist practice

The goal of this first results chapter is to uncover the informational nature of Buddhist practice by demonstrating the use of religious information in the everyday lives of Buddhist practitioners in the NKT. This chapter responds to the first research question: “What are the everyday life spiritual information practices of Buddhists of the New Kadampa Tradition?” Its goal is to explore the idea that religious practices are often information practices—that is, people needing, seeking, and using information and experiencing the outcomes of this process. This will be accomplished primarily through presenting the results of both the qualitative content analysis of *Joyful Path of Good Fortune* and the semi-structured interviews. In the continuum between Dharma of Scripture and Dharma of Insight, information practices

This chapter will begin first by defining spiritual information within the context of this dissertation and the manners of conceiving information in a Buddhist context based also on the reports of the qualitative content analysis of a text and interviews. These definitions are foundational to the rest of the dissertation. They are included in particular because they may appear unconventional and novel and may potentially expand (or further complicate) notions of information within the discipline of LIS. This is followed by a list of religious information practices, motivations, and outcomes that were uncovered in the data, speaking to the first three research questions which seek to bring light to the informational nature of Buddhist practice. Where possible, contributions or examples from both the qualitative content analysis of a text and the interviews are presented to give examples of prescriptive information practices from the content analysis as well as “lived” information practices gleaned from interview participants. Table 3 below offers a summation of how each practice or theme is supported by the empirical results. All sections in this chapter used both the qualitative content analysis as well as the interviews as evidence with the exception of a few sections noted in the table below where only one method was used.



| Section | Practice or Theme  | What Methods Used?   |
|---------|--|--|
| 4.1     | Defining Spiritual Information   | Qualitative Content Analysis<br>Interviews   |
| 4.2     | Social Dharma Practices<br><br>EXCEPTIONS<br>4.2.1.1.4 Describing the Dharma<br>4.2.1.4 Online Social Practices<br>4.2.5.1 Rejecting the Dharma<br>4.2.6.2 Correct Motivations<br>4.2.6.3 Determinations | Qualitative Content Analysis<br>Interviews<br><br>Qualitative Content Analysis<br>Interviews<br>Qualitative Content Analysis<br>Qualitative Content Analysis<br>Qualitative Content Analysis |
| 4.3     | Existential and Spiritual Motivations for Information Practices  | Interviews   |
| 4.4     | Outcomes of Spiritual Information Practices  | Interviews   |

**Table 3: Summary of Results by Empirical Method**

Again, as a reminder, the dissertation often refers to “Buddhist practice” in a general sense as information behaviours and practices, but for the large part this was used as a shorthand for ease of reading and writing. In reality, when referring to “Buddhist practice” it is meant to be read more specifically as *New Kadampa* Buddhist practice.

#### 4.1 Defining spiritual information

Kari, in his work with people who are concerned with the paranormal, defines spiritual information as a message “provided or received by extraphysical means” (2009, p. 454). While this definition is certainly applicable in some respects to this dissertation as well, it

is not fully satisfactory as it is a limited definition. It neglects (admittedly common) understandings of “spiritual” that include characteristics related to “ultimate purpose, ethics, commitment to a higher power, and a seeking of the divine in daily experience” (Emmons, 2005, p. 736), and not merely associated with information that is from a paranormal being. Here instead, a more concise definition of spiritual information is opted for as information that concerns itself or is about religion or spirituality.

As was noted in the introduction, a religion, according to Kari, can be understood as a collection of its written or oral teachings. When understood as such, religious practices can be more easily studied by information scholars investigating them as instances of information practices. In this case, this conceptualization by Kari acts as a gateway to examining the teachings of Buddha and religion of Buddhism. However useful this idea is as a conceptual stepping stone, studying information practices in a religious context invites to the study of information practices the challenges that accompany the study of religion. Thankfully in the case of Buddhism, great value is placed on the teachings and the use of the teachings, cementing the idea of the centrality of information and the use of information in the practice of Buddhism. For example, Gyatso (1995) writes, “Our liberation and enlightenment [the soteriological goal of Buddhism] depend upon the speech of Buddha, for if Buddha had not taught Dharma there would be no method for freeing oneself from samsara” (p. 550). In other words, there is no Buddhist path without the information provided by Buddha on how to attain the same spiritual state he did.

The first challenge presented to the concept of information in a spiritual context, as has been noted and will be explored, is that the Dharma is understood to be both information in a traditional sense *and* realization, a mental phenomenon. During the examination of Buddhism through an informational lens, the idea of information itself is complicated as information no longer retains its permanence as “mind-independent, structural entities that are cohering clusters of data, understood as concrete, relational points of lack of uniformity” (Floridi, 2010, p. 71). Instead, as will be argued, the Buddhist path traces the nature of information changes along a continuum from text to understanding, to meaning, to feeling, to insight or wisdom, ultimately one’s awareness and affecting a transformation. While the Dharma understood as religious information may begin as information according to Floridi’s suggestion above, as information is needed, sought,

and used, it is difficult to pinpoint precisely where information ceases to be information and is transformed into something else. Despite this trouble, understandings of spiritual information need to be operationalized for sake of clarity. Following data from the qualitative content analysis of a text and interviews, several types of spiritual informational phenomena in Buddhist practice emerged. These can be roughly divided into three types: information-like spiritual information, continuum-like spiritual information, and realization-like spiritual information.

#### 4.1.1 Information-like spiritual information

The first type of spiritual information is information-like spiritual information. It is so deemed to note its similarity with a common conceptualization of information within LIS, that of *information-as-thing* (Buckland, 1991) where documents and data are viewed as information because they are informative. Despite the tautological issues with this definition, when compared with other uncommon categories of spiritual information used in this project, a “traditional” definition makes the most sense.

Dharma teachings are indeed referred to by Gyatso (1995) as information. He warns against giving a Dharma discourse or teaching “full of false information and incorrect advice...” (p. 318). Here he is writing in the negative, but one can still imply that when performed correctly, a Dharma teaching would contain correct information and advice. Relatedly, he also describes the Dharma as other familiar informative phenomena such as advice (p. 15), outlines (p. 92), instructions (p. 7), commentary (p. 17), or explanations (p. 476). Within LIS, there has not been much investigation into what differentiates these different types of information phenomena. For example, the concept of ‘advice’ is often used interchangeably with information (e.g. Wilson, 1997, p. 562; Ardichvili et al., 2002, p. 5; McKenzie, 2003, p. 34). However, these related concepts can be understood in a common-sense manner as being similar phenomena possessing an informing power and which are able to manifest in documentary and oral forms.

Near the end of the interviews, participants were asked about what sort of information the Dharma was or whether the Dharma was information at all. Some interview participants described the Dharma as indeed being information or a type of information. They stated that the Dharma was a special type of information that contained informative powers.

Specifically, they believed it was information about “daily life” (Michelle), information “about the nature of reality” (Rachel), or information “on how to be happy” (Lindsay). This also underlines the nature or definition of spiritual information itself as information related to spiritual, philosophical, existential or meaningful goals.

#### 4.1.2 Continuum-like spiritual information

The next category of spiritual information is one that exists on the continuum between information-like spiritual information and the end of the continuum, the realization-like spiritual information. Due to its in-between status, this type of spiritual information is characterized by action, process, and usage, and could be considered to be in the nature of transformation itself. Buckland’s (1991) information-as-process hints at this intangible type of information which is synonymous with “the act of informing” (p. 351) itself.

Again, Gyatso’s (1995) writing hints at this type of spiritual information. Gyatso calls Dharma an “inner science” (p. 502) which is meant to invoke the process of the scientific method. In this case, rigorously testing and experimenting with the information-like Dharma and then coming to a conclusion and subsequently discovering or disproving something. Additionally, Gyatso’s use of the word “guidance” (p. 7) to describe the Dharma suggests a usage in a long-term setting, providing information or experience over a period of time.

Similarly, in the interviews, participants frequently referred to the Dharma as a tool, rather than information, further suggesting a process-like nature to the Dharma where there is not just a single act of information but a series of acts that are used over a period of time. Michelle says, “it’s useful. It’s like tools. I prefer to match it with tools than information,” hinting at the non-static and transformative aspects of the Dharma. Additionally, Madeline speaks to the goal-orientated nature of Dharma, pointing towards the final type of spiritual information. She says, “the teachings are the only tools that I think are available to society to break the delusions of our mind”. These definitions do not suggest a single use of spiritual information, but repeated uses. While at times intangible, this type of spiritual information is recognizable as a type of information phenomenon that is mentioned by Gyatso and the interview participants and thus is germane to the discussion in this dissertation.

### 4.1.3 Realization-like spiritual information

In the Buddhist tradition, realizations are “A stable and non-mistaken experience of a virtuous object that directly protects us from suffering” (Realization, 2015). Here, stable refers to permanency and “non-mistaken” refers to the fact that the object is correctly viewed as not possessing inherent existence (i.e. existence from its own side, by its own power, independently existing, existing in an impossible manner). It also refers to the fact that the virtuous object is understood in a perfect manner, that there is no mistake in terms of the object’s nature or function. Realizations are the goal of spiritual practice in the Buddhist tradition. A Buddha (Skt. “Awakened One”) is an individual who has completed all of the realizations of the Buddhist spiritual path.

While the other two types of spiritual information were comparable to Buckland’s categories of information, Buckland’s third type of information, information-as-knowledge, is not *entirely* equivalent to realization-like information, although they do share some qualities. They are similar in that they are both intangible and subjective (Buckland, 1991, p. 351), occurring intrapersonally. However, realization-like information is not merely altered knowledge structures in the minds of individuals when something is learned that can be recalled (like remembering the fact that the capital of Canada is Ottawa), but is something far more profound: an expansive reconstruction of the worldview of an individual. Buckland’s definition does not capture this fully.

In *Joyful Path of Good Fortune*, Gyatso describes the Dharma in terms of the final goal of using spiritual information, spiritual realizations. For example, he describes realizations as possessing “the nature of wisdom light” (p. 57) referring to a realization’s qualities of opposing minds of ignorance and misperceptions of reality that cause suffering. However, Gyatso’s description of the Dharma as the “meaning of Dharma instructions” (p. 26) is perhaps slightly more useful to understandings of information in LIS. The textual and oral teachings are in reality pointing-out instructions that refer to states of mind or experiences within an individual. These definitions also suggest the potential usefulness of hermeneutics (the study of interpretation) as a helpful tool for understanding information and information practices and behaviours which will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter.

Participants also expressed their understanding of Dharma as a phenomenon that exists primarily within the mind. Amanda describes the Dharma as realized by her teacher, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, and their relationship to the written or oral Dharma instructions. She says, “They’re all his minds! Every one of them is a mind, how amazing is that?! How amazing, they’re all his minds and they’re in books.” Continuum-like spiritual information is inferred as the intermediary step here between the pointing out instructions that Gyatso has provided to his student and her eventual experience of realization-like information in the future. Furthermore, Kyle describes a Dharma realization as “embodied information” while Joanne says that it is “an experience that is personal, beyond words, but registered by the intellect”. It is interesting to note that participants described their experience or understanding of realization both as an integrated part of their mind or Being<sup>9</sup>, but also as something separate and discernible from other types of meaning or embodied knowledge. Embodied knowing and knowledge is an emerging area of scholarship in LIS, as was evidenced in recent issues of *Library Trends* (Winter 2018, volume 66, issues 3 and 4) dedicated to the topic, and previous work in the area. However, the conceptualization of embodiment that is employed within this area of research is not entirely commensurate with the concept of realization in a Buddhist sense. For example, Annamaree Lloyd discusses embodied knowledge and its creation through information literacy skills, but her conception of embodiment is decidedly physical and material. She writes, “the body becomes a site of encoded knowledge, through which others can access information about practices and profession” (2005, p. 86). Instead, the embodied spiritual information that is the essence of a spiritual realization fits more within the realm of understanding embodiment as the site of Being-in-the-world, as a summation of in-forming, a shaping from within—as the etymological origins of the word ‘information’ signify (Varela, 1979; Peters, 1988).

Finally, it is important to note here that there is a circularity or process between these different ways of understanding spiritual information. Written or oral teachings

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<sup>9</sup> The word “Being” will be capitalized when it refers to the existential state of being throughout the dissertation in order to differentiate it from the verb (to be) and from the noun (human beings, living beings, etc.). Although when the term occurs in a direct quotation, the word retains its capitalization or lack thereof as found in the source.

understood as information-like information are the basis of contemplation and investigation which become, over time, the nature of continuum-like information. This leads to a complete embodiment of the written teachings as realization-like spiritual information which can then be communicated by a practitioner as written or oral teachings.

#### 4.1.3.1 Spiritual information from an inner source / from the heart

In Buddhist teachings the mind is a non-physical phenomenon having the nature of clarity; that is, it is a basis for perceiving objects and the functions to perceive and understand objects (Gyatso, 2013). Since it is non-physical, the mind is not equal to, or synonymous with the brain, as the brain is a physical phenomenon (it possesses form, shape, and colour). In the Tantric teachings, the traditional understanding is that the seat of the mind is located at the centre of the chest, at the heart (Lopez, 1988; Sugunasiri, 1995). This does not refer to the actual organ of the heart, but to a place in the psycho-spiritual body which is necessary to the practice of completion stage tantra. With the eventual goal of practicing the Buddhist tantras, Kadampa practitioners are instructed to meditate ‘at the heart’ to familiarize themselves with this practice for when they become proficient tantric meditators. Its importance is echoed in Gyatso’s text and in the interviews. “The heart” has two senses, but both senses speak to it being a source of, or repository for, realization-like spiritual information. In the first sense, the heart is synonymous for a person’s “true self”, “deep self”, or source of Being. Gyatso (1995) instructs to “keep [Dharma instructions] in your heart” (p. 25), suggesting to the practitioner to develop the information-like spiritual information to a place where it ceases to become superficial and becomes realization-like, inseparable from one’s Being. In the interviews, Amanda said that her Dharma practice helps facilitate her “understanding myself in relation to me, my true self, my heart”. It is a place where Amanda feels the Dharma teachings “end up” and it is from this profound place where change is happening from practicing Dharma.

In the second sense, “heart” is employed as a source of spiritual information. Participants described it as a trustworthy source of information, primarily of reliable intuition. Participants relied on this inner source for a sense of truth. For example, Prudence said “I

just knew, something deep in my heart told me what was the truth” while Amanda elaborates upon the extraordinary characteristics of this inner source:

It’s not a feeling, and it’s not a thought, it’s an absolute knowing, it’s a congruence. It arises from my heart, and it’s not contaminated by anything. It’s a knowing...It’s just something that we know and it glows and it feels right...it fits with every aspect of my Being.

Because of these positive qualities, especially its unmistakable nature, some participants mentioned that they rely upon their heart for decision-making in their lives believing it to be the best course of action. For example, Carla says:

Well, I listen to here, at my heart. How do I feel then? If I make a decision, I’ve been taking care of that for many, many years, to see if it’s a good decision or not. I realized more and more that when I was relying upon what I was feeling here, I was making good decisions, and when I wasn’t, I was making poor decisions.

Furthermore, in some formal Buddhist practices in the NKT, the Spiritual Guide is visualized being dissolved and mixed into the mind at the heart. Subsequently, it is imagined that the practitioner’s mind becomes the same nature as the Guru’s ultimate nature, the *Dharmakāya*. This practice is called “Guru Yoga”.<sup>10</sup> Then, part of the subsequent practice involves remembering the Guru mixed with the mind. Thus, the heart becomes a location for the Spiritual Guide, the source of the Dharma teachings, which the practitioner can connect with an enlightened mind at any time. Some practitioners even engage in conversation with their Spiritual Guide at their heart for intimate advice. Michelle describes her experience interacting with her Spiritual Guide:

Michelle: So, he said, listen more and you will hear him!

Roger: Do you find that you hear him?

Michelle: Yes! We talk!

Roger: What is that experience like?

Michelle: It’s like a conversation in my head. I know that it’s him because it’s not something that I would talk about on my own.

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<sup>10</sup> Guru Yoga is featured in practices such as *Heart Jewel (Ganden Lha Gyäma)* and *Offering to the Spiritual Guide (Lama Chöpa)*.



In summary, this inner source of realization-like information is an important aspect of spiritual information in both Buddhist scripture and in the experiences of Buddhist practitioners.

#### 4.1.4 The Dharma is not information

Some participants were often quite adamant that the Dharma was *not* information because, in their view, information lacked spiritual characteristics typically associated with the Dharma. The use of the word “information” to describe Buddha’s teachings was not deemed appropriate to be used in this case. Justin said, “I don’t consider anything related to Dharma to be information. It’s not flat”, suggesting that normal information lacked something that the Dharma possessed, regardless of whether it had informative qualities or not. He goes on to equate information with the work performed by government employees, adding “It’s not brought to bear on producing anything of value, a good, a service that affects change in the world”. Similarly, other participants described “normal” information as ordinary, meaningless, empty, samsaric, or intellectual when compared to the spiritual information of the Dharma.

When study participants insisted that the Dharma was not information, they seemed to conceptualize the Dharma closer in sense to the Dharmas of Insight rather than the Dharmas of Scripture. Gyatso presents this conceptualization in *Joyful Path of Good Fortune*. He writes, “it is one thing to know that something is true on the level of information and it is quite another thing to have personal experience of its truth” (p. 93). In this case, participants seemed to have internalized this teaching on the status of information within Kadampa Buddhism. Yet later, he writes contrarily, “If we give a Dharma discourse full of false information and incorrect advice...” (p. 318), suggesting that the contents of oral teachings are indeed information (or advice) with its seemingly ordinary characteristics. This demonstrates that Gyatso capitalizes on different conceptions of information to make his point to the reader. What this also demonstrates is that the continuum between scripture and insight (or, information-like to realization-like) retains an informational quality throughout, even when it becomes intangible.

## 4.2 Everyday life information practices of Kadampa Buddhists

This section of the dissertation seeks to list major aspects of Buddhist spiritual practice and explicitly demonstrate the informational nature of Buddhist practice. It seeks to answer the question of what it means to practice Dharma through the lens of information studies, and to answer the first research question, “What are the everyday life information practices of Kadampa Buddhists?” It therefore lists practices that may seem self-evident as information practices as they are practices that individuals have traditionally used while engaging with information, and yet they are included because they are an integral part of Kadampa Buddhist practice. Because they are already traditionally associated with the study of information behaviour, learning or education in general, they may have become invisible and their importance diminished in the minds of some. Furthermore, in this section, everyday life information practices are not limited to practices using information-like spiritual information but also include practices of information that involve the other types of information as well. Presentation of Buddhist spiritual information practices are roughly divided into social practices, intrapersonal practices, practices which are featured in other models of information behaviour, and liturgical information practices.

### 4.2.1 Social Dharma practices

Social Dharma practices are information practices that involve the participation of more than one person. Often these are information practices where one is either in the act of giving, receiving or asking about Dharma from spiritual information sources such as texts, but also human and non-human individuals.

#### 4.2.1.1 Giving Dharma

The information practices of giving Dharma are characterized by a unidirectional movement of spiritual information from an individual to another Dharma practitioner or non-practitioner. In giving Dharma, the information is moving away from the person engaging in the act of giving.

#### 4.2.1.1.1 Formal teaching of Dharma

Teaching in this context of giving Dharma primarily means delivering orally a Dharma teaching to a group of more than two individuals. In a formal setting of a Kadampa Buddhist centre or temple, a teacher will give spiritual information from a raised position at the front of the room, facing an audience of students or disciples.

In *Joyful Path of Good Fortune*, Gyatso mentions teaching as a spiritual information practice many times. In this work he also provides instructions on how to teach Dharma properly, revealing some of the specific actions involved in this information practice. Teaching Dharma involves possessing an expertise in the Dharma accumulated through receiving teachings for a long while and from experience having put the teachings into practice. Gyatso (1995) writes, “Before we can teach Dharma we need to have studied many instructions and gained personal experience” (p. 35). Expertise is required so that the correct instructions are relayed to the students. Teachers in the NKT are representatives of Geshe Kelsang Gyatso and therefore try to be as accurate as they can be to the teachings he has presented in his written works and oral discourses. To prepare for teaching, a teacher may engage in other information practices such as reading and contemplating to re-familiarize her or himself with the subject about to be taught.

Gyatso (1995) provides more detail about the specific goals of teaching Dharma. He instructs, "To bring out the meaning more clearly he or she should elaborate skillfully applying logical reasoning, quoting readily from the scriptures, and using vivid examples that are relevant to the experience of those who listen” (p. 37). Thus, the purpose of giving Dharma in a formal context is not merely to relay information-like spiritual information, such as quoting from the scriptures, but also to convey continuum-like information through relating some of the insights from contemplation that the teacher has engaged in themselves. Furthermore, Gyatso’s description of teaching reveals the ultimate target of receiving information-like information: the transformation of personal experience and the development of realization-like information. Kyle, one of the interview participants, is part of a teaching team at a Kadampa centre and teaches in formal settings frequently. In a similar fashion to Gyatso, he describes the essence of how he teaches: “But generally, I’ll just make sure that I’ve got points of reference to what I’m saying in the books which I’ll quote and try to come up with cool examples and

things”. Kyle uses Gyatso’s books as a means of relating specific teachings in an exact manner as well as tries to find examples or analogies that will be appealing and relevant to the audience that he is teaching so that they will begin to transform their experience.

#### 4.2.1.1.2 Informal giving of Dharma

Giving spiritual information can also occur in informal settings such as personal conversations or in everyday interactions with people. Teaching or giving Dharma in informal settings requires less expertise than in formal settings, although it still requires some sort of familiarity with the teachings or putting the teachings into practice. In *Joyful Path*, Gyatso does not mention informal sharing of Dharma as frequently as formal teachings. It is more often implicitly assumed as part of other information practices such as discussing the Dharma where spiritual information may be exchanged back and forth. For example, in *Joyful Path*, Gyatso writes, “If we cannot teach extensively we can at least give proper advice to those who are unhappy” (p. 223), identifying a difference between formal and informal giving contexts.

Offering spiritual advice is a primary method of giving Dharma in informal settings. Interview participants mentioned being recipients of spiritual advice from other spiritual practitioners as well as offering spiritual advice to others. Giving spiritual advice informally can be divided into two types. The first type of giving spiritual advice is to practitioners or those already experienced with Buddhist teachings. The second type of giving spiritual advice is to those with no experience with Buddhist teachings. The difference between the two, generally, is the type of advice that is given. For example, Vanessa recounts the time she first received her Highest Yoga Tantra empowerments and the advice she received for her tantric practice. She says, “I started with *Dakini Yoga*, everybody said to start with that”, relating how other practitioners offered this particular advice to her because she already had experienced with Buddha’s teachings. The advice she received was not inappropriate for the level of experience and familiarity with the teachings she possessed. For those situations when interview participants gave spiritual advice to non-practitioners when requested, they related how difficult this was sometimes, that it was a sort of negotiation between providing helpful advice to relieve suffering or solve problems and not proselytizing and seeming like a “normal” individual. When Julia was asked whether she gives advice to non-practitioners, she said:

I might, but it wouldn't sound like Dharma. I don't want to push my religion on other people, I might say something like everything's impermanent, I might say something like that. But I might listen to them and hear their pain about whatever it is too and let them have more of a peaceful mind if possible. It's a challenge. I have some close friends and who have no interest in Buddhism whatsoever. But I'm really close to them. I navigate that.

A key feature of giving spiritual information in informal settings seems to be this translation of spiritual information to non-expert contexts in order not to alienate them from the potentially foreign context of spirituality within a secular society. Vanessa echoes Julia's statements above: "If someone asked me for advice, I would, yes. If it's someone outside, I may use some non-Dharma words."

#### 4.2.1.1.3 Giving Dharma materially

A large majority of the information practices described here discuss the use of information in a textual way, as words on a page. However, physical copies of the textual or oral information are also engaged with. Documents, books, and audio recordings of Dharma teachings can be given in their physical manifestation. The practice of generosity is an important practice in Mahayana Buddhism, and giving the Dharma is a supreme form of giving since, the teachings say, the receiver benefits not only in this life, but also in future lives. When material forms of Dharma are given, the spiritual information contained within the physical manifestations are also indirectly given. As evidence of this information practice in Buddhist practice, Gyatso describes this type of material giving. Gyatso (1995) writes "we can give them books or tapes or pay for them to visit a Dharma Centre" (p. 259). Additionally, interview participant Michelle recalls an instance when she was the recipient of a gift of Dharma books: "He gave all of his Dharma books to a friend of mine. She took one for herself and then offered them all to me. It's like a treasure for me."

#### 4.2.1.1.4 Describing the Dharma

There are two primary reasons for describing the Dharma. The first reason to describe the Dharma is to demonstrate its authenticity. By relating the origination, qualities or outcomes of the information contained within the work in order, the reader may be persuaded and encouraged to engage with the information in a thorough manner. For example, to prove the authenticity of the Lamrim teachings, Gyatso (1995) writes "The

Lamrim instructions were originally taught by Buddha Shakyamuni” (p. 5). Since Buddha Shakyamuni is the founder of Buddhism, the reader may be more confident in using this spiritual information. Gyatso also describes the outcomes of using Dharma teachings: “By listening to or reading these teachings we can learn how to control our mind and always keep a good motivation at our heart” (p. xi). By describing the outcomes of using this information, the author attempts to relay the benefits of practicing the instructions. The second reason for describing the Dharma is so that there is no confusion about what purpose the information serves. For example, Gyatso (1995) writes, “Thus the main function of the Lamrim instructions is to fulfil the needs and wishes of all living beings” (p. ix). By describing the Dharma in this explicit way, it closes the doors on later interpreters misconstruing what was taught.

#### 4.2.1.2 Receiving Dharma

The information practices of receiving Dharma are characterized by a unidirectional movement of spiritual information from a spiritual information source such as a sacred text or an interpersonal source such as another Dharma practitioner to an individual who perceives a recognition of the Dharma. The opposite of the information practice of giving Dharma is receiving Dharma.

##### 4.2.1.2.1 Reading Dharma

A primary way that practitioners receive Dharma instructions is through reading them. The purpose of reading Dharma instructions is to become familiar with them and then to put them into practice. Gyatso (1995) provides instructions in *Joyful Path* on how to correctly read Dharma texts. First, he advises that “such texts are not to be read like newspapers” (p. 522) meaning that Dharma texts are not meant for quick consumption but are to be thoughtfully engaged with. Indeed, a practitioner should read “with an open and attentive mind in such a way as to be able to remember the instructions and reflect upon them” (p. 25). The practice of reading Dharma leads to other information practices, as Gyatso mentions above, to remembering and contemplation; receiving the text is merely a preparation for action upon it. In accordance with Gyatso’s advice, interview participant Kelly mentions that she “usually only read[s] a few pages a day”.

Reading was a common information practice mentioned by many of the interview participants. Reading was often mentioned within the context of participating in one of the study programs conducted by NKT centres. Participation in the Foundation Program or Teacher Training Program involves studying a series of Geshe Kelsang Gyatso's texts. Studying one book at a time, students are expected to read sections of the chosen book in preparation for class. They then receive an oral transmission of the text during the class time. The combination of receiving the Dharma both textually and orally helps facilitate familiarity with the text. Participation in a study program is a primary director of reading habits that are part of a Kadampa's spiritual practice. Jennifer recounts the reasons why she is reading certain Dharma texts:

Because I'm on a study program, that's the book I'd be reading, which is *Tantric Grounds and Paths* right now as well as anything that would supplement that, that is mentioned in the class, like *Clear Light of Bliss* or something, something related to what I'm studying, or something that would give me more information about a particular practice. That usually comes from a teaching from that practice. That's what's usually guiding my reading at any given time.

The text she is primarily engaging with is a work that is a part of the Teacher Training Program of the NKT. Additional reading is deemed warranted by the participant when other works are mentioned in the class time of the program. In this case Jennifer is seeking more information about how to engage in the practices that are described in the main source material. Dharma texts are often viewed as a reference source, and thus are important resources to go to receive information. Michelle's usage of Dharma texts as a means to receive Dharma is mentioned by her. She says, "I will need to search about it and read because I don't know the answer and I think it's very important to know clearly the answer of that question".

#### 4.2.1.2.2 Listening to Dharma

Another primary way that practitioners receive spiritual information is by listening to oral teachings. The purpose of listening to the Dharma is to become familiar with it. Along with reading, listening was the most frequently mentioned information practice in Gyatso's text, signaling its importance. Gyatso (1995) explains that "Traditionally, disciples learn Dharma by first listening to oral instructions from their Spiritual Guide" (p. 25). Listening most frequently occurs in formal teaching contexts where a

practitioner receives instructions from a qualified teacher but can also occur in informal contexts. Buddhism was primarily an oral tradition for the first five hundred years or so of its history before the teachings began to be written down (Norman, 1997). With the rise of literacy rates over the last millennium, reading has become an acceptable “substitute” for receiving teachings in the traditional way. However, oral transmission remains an important aspect (Analayo, 2017) of Tibetan Buddhism and Modern Kadampa Buddhism as not only are the words or instructions transmitted to the listener, but also non-tangible benefits such as blessings from the lineage holders (enlightened beings) and special potentialities in the mind to develop the realizations of the text during such transmission.

Like reading, listening is an information practice that accompanies or leads to other information practices. Gyatso (1995) writes “listening is the basis for contemplating and meditating on Dharma” (p. 25). Without having first received instructions on what the meditation objects are and how they are developed by listening to Dharma teachings, it is not possible to contemplate and meditate on them.

Interview participants also mentioned occasions where they listened to Dharma. Steve recounts how he listens to audiobooks of Gyatso’s works while travelling. He says, “Sometimes I listen to that [the book *Modern Buddhism*] going to and from [a nearby city]. I just turn on a chapter so it’s sort of random.” Familiarity with the teachings is developed by listening to the instructions many times, which is what Steve does by listening to a recorded copy of a text.

#### 4.2.1.2.3 Receiving commentary to Dharma

Generally, the Buddhist canon of teachings, in the Tibetan tradition, can be roughly divided into teachings (the speech of Buddha) and their commentaries. Thus, receiving commentaries is an important practice that practitioners engage in. Commentaries are not merely “scholastic commentary, but rather soteriological exegesis that [is] essential for the effective practice of the path” (Cox, 2004, p. 1). They too can be classified as a type of spiritual information. The authority of the commentarial tradition can be supported by the Buddhist hermeneutic tradition of privileging the definitive meanings of teachings over their literal or explicit meanings (Harrison, 2004) that are often elucidated by



practitioners who have had experience in gleaning the definitive meanings of the teachings from having put them into practice.

Commentaries are only briefly mentioned by Gyatso in *Joyful Path* when he says practitioners should “receive commentaries on it” (p. 17), meaning receiving commentaries on the teachings. Although this does not negate the importance of commentaries since *Joyful Path* is itself a commentary on the Lamrim teachings of Atisha. Commentaries were also briefly mentioned by interview participants. Prudence recalls receiving commentary to spiritual information in course of participating in the Foundation Program (FP). She recalls:

Yeah, that’s what FP was really valuable for. Through Geshe-la’s<sup>11</sup> blessings and Je Tsongkhapa’s blessings, every week there was a question of mine answered, if not in the text of the book, it was in [my teacher]’s commentary.

Prudence’s recollection demonstrates the informative nature of these commentaries that act in conjunction to formal transmission of spiritual information.

#### 4.2.1.3 Asking for or about Dharma

The information practices of asking for, giving, and receiving Dharma as spiritual information are, in reality, interconnected practices with some practices not occurring unless prompted by a request or a need.

The practice of asking for spiritual information is not explicitly mentioned in *Joyful Path of Good Fortune*, although Gyatso does suggest asking Sangha members questions as a method of recalling spiritual information that has been recently read or listened to (p. 32). It does feature more prominently however in the interviews where participants demonstrated asking for spiritual information from others in their Buddhist community. Primarily, participants asked either for spiritual information in the form of a specific teaching, clarification or piece of advice, or they asked for spiritual information in the form of a Dharmic course of action to take.

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<sup>11</sup> “Geshe-la” refers to Geshe Kelsang Gyatso. The suffix “-la” in the Tibetan language is a marker of respect.

In particular, resident teachers of NKT centres were relied upon heavily by interview participants as sources of spiritual information. Rachel's description of when she had asked for spiritual information demonstrates the information practice of asking used in both ways mentioned above. Rachel recalls:

Rachel: The teacher, she has a wonderful sense of support and I feel like when I have a question, she's really great about answering it, but not just her, but many different people that have been practicing for a long time. I feel like I can ask questions.

Roger: Are there particular occasions when you look to other people, or just in general?

Rachel: I think as I'm going along and if there's something that I just don't quite understand from the reading, or terms, that was a big thing for me when I first started. You know, you hear a lot of unfamiliar terms, getting clarification. But also, when circumstances arrive where you're just not sure what the right thing to do.

As is demonstrated the spiritual information provided by teachers and other Sangha members aids not only with intellectual understanding of spiritual information understood as information-like information, but also with understanding aspects of experiential information such as actions to take. Indeed, while some participants recognized the value of Gyatso's texts, they often preferred interpersonal sources for spiritual information.

Julia says:

To help me deal with problems? Not as a much. I think I go to my Sangha members and especially my partner [who is a Kadampa], or I'll go to the Buddhist centre. We have a Buddhist centre about 20 minutes from here. I take classes there, so I might go there, I might go to a puja. It's not my number one go to [the texts].

This echoes findings by Harris and Dewdney (1994) that people will seek information that is the most accessible, which is often interpersonal in nature. The texts in this case are inaccessible due to confusion.

#### 4.2.1.4 Online social practices

The online environment has become a significant locale for *online religion*, that is, interactive religious practices performed on the Internet, as well as *religion online* which is the presence of religious traditions offering information in a non-interactive setting

(Helland, 2005). Religious practices in online environments are especially sympathetic to being studied as information practices because the Internet and ICTs [information and communication technologies] in general bring to light the “intrinsically informational nature of human agents” (Floridi, 2010, p. 10). Interview participants were asked about whether they consulted or used any online resources or engaged in any online practices as part of their spiritual practice. Many participants answered in the affirmative. First and foremost, social networking giant Facebook was mentioned along with other social media and messaging applications or websites. Participants primarily mentioned social information practices that they engaged in these environments as the online environment is especially suited for them.

Nathan mentions his use of Facebook and messaging app WhatsApp:

Also, Facebook. I'd say Facebook is an important source for me. We have a WhatsApp group here... We share a lot of information through WhatsApp. That's interesting because you forget many things very easily, but someone just shares an image with a great message. You say, “Ah, that's a great reminder”.

Nathan's experience is also evidence of the efficacy of the online environment for encountering information (Erdelez, 1995), in this case, direct quotations of scripture from Geshe Kelsang Gyatso's works embedded into images to create memes for use on social media.

Another frequently mentioned aspect of Facebook that was well used by interview participants was Facebook groups. A particularly large group, “Students and Followers of Geshe Kelsang Gyatso” was mentioned as a place where practitioners both asked for and gave spiritual information. Travis mentions his experience in this group:

There's a website on Facebook that I like being a part of, it's called Students and Followers of Geshe Kelsang Gyatso. They ask questions in there all the time. It's a fun place for me to engage. They're constantly bringing up topics that are very lively. It gives me more opportunity to be more mindful.

Travis' experience suggests that these groups aid in developing his understanding and experience of spiritual information through the social information practices that he witnesses in the group (the asking and giving of information amongst other members) as well as the intrapersonal practices (more on these in the next section).

Katrina uses Facebook as a means of giving spiritual information to other people that she is Facebook friends with. She says:

If it's good and it helps, I share it. If it makes people think and feel good for an instant, I'll share it. I always share Geshe-la's things that come through.

In these cases, spiritual information is shared in a one-to-many situation through which others may eventually encounter it.

Besides Facebook, participants also mentioned other resources that they frequently used online as sources of spiritual information in the sense of religion online as well as online religion. Greg says, "I do visit the NKT website and I watch videos and also once and while I'll go on to YouTube and watch some of Geshe-la's videos." The NKT website is an important place to glean spiritual information in a religion online sense. Jennifer also mentions that the NKT website is where she gets information about spiritual holidays in the tradition such as Buddha's Enlightenment Day and Buddha's Return from Heaven Day. YouTube videos of teachings are an online substitution or replacement for being physically present at formal teaching sessions, allowing practitioners to asynchronously receive spiritual information.

## 4.2.2 Intrapersonal practices

Intrapersonal information practices are those information practices that do not involve other people directly. Generally, they involve internal mental processes or actions. Some of these practices could be grouped together and understood as actually "putting the Dharma into practice" as is often the term, separate from the information practices of reading, or listening to Dharma which are required for putting Dharma into practice but do not necessarily lead to a direct experience of Dharma and thus are not technically understood as "putting Dharma into practice."

### 4.2.2.1 Contemplating Dharma

There are two types of meditation in the Kadampa Tradition of Buddhism: analytical or contemplative meditation and placement meditation. The practice of contemplation is synonymous with the first type of meditation, while placement meditation involves holding the object that was developed in contemplation with single pointed concentration

(more on this in section 4.2.2.2). Contemplation is particularly important in the early stages of Dharma practice as a practitioner begins to familiarize themselves with the great variety of meditation objects available to them. The function of contemplation, understood informationally, is to transform information-like spiritual information into continuum-like spiritual information. While later, placement meditation helps move from continuum-like to realization-like. They all however begin with the Dharma understood as information-like spiritual information in the form of text or an oral teaching, which is demonstrated here by Gyatso (1995):

To practise meditation we first need to learn Dharma by listening to and reading correct instructions. We then need to contemplate the meaning of what we have heard and read. We contemplate Dharma to understand its meaning clearly and to gain conviction, testing it to see if it is logical and coherent, whether it makes sense in terms of our own experience, and whether its purpose is worthwhile. Once we have gained a firm understanding of the meaning of Dharma and have confidence in its reliability, we are ready to practise meditation. (p. 89)

Contemplation is meant to examine a meditation object from many perspectives in order to understand it fully. Meditation objects can be any number of virtuous minds, determinations or mental phenomena, for example, virtuous minds such as renunciation, non-attachment, wishing love, compassion, or emptiness. In addition to the purposes of contemplating the Dharma that Gyatso mentions in the above example, interview participants revealed that contemplation, for them, has two other characteristics: (1) It helps them to reveal uncommon characteristics of the meditation objects that they are contemplating; and (2) it takes their understanding to a new or deeper level.

Interview participants mentioned intrapersonal information practices that they use to “take the words off the page”.

- (1) Thinking: “I’ve really tried to think it out” (Joanne)
- (2) Visualization: “I try to visualize situations that are very close to me...tried to create a live experience, a live image” (Nathan)
- (3) Connection to personal experience: “try to connect it within something that I’ve seen, or something that I’ve heard, something that is very close to me” (Nathan)

- (4) Mental scaffolding: “You have these different thoughts and they just keep building on each other in a kind of strengthening fashion” (Travis)

Travis’ comments reveal an important aspect to the practice of contemplation. This is not an information practice that is performed one time. Contemplation is meant to be performed frequently. There are many meditation objects that require thorough contemplation.

#### 4.2.2.2 Meditating on Dharma

Accompanying analytical meditation or contemplative meditation mentioned above is placement meditation. Placement meditation resembles more closely other traditional forms of meditation where one is seated and focused uniquely on the task of meditation. Elsewhere in his writings, Gyatso calls this “the actual meditation” (Gyatso, 2016a), hence the term for the information practice used here.

Gyatso (2003) defines meditation as “a mind that concentrates on a virtuous object and is the main cause of inner peace. The practice of meditation is a method for acquainting our mind with virtue” (p. 6). This definition explains that the nature of meditation is to be concentrated single-pointedly on its object while its function is to acquaint the mind with the object, inducing a sense of inner peace.

While the goal of meditation is to eventually develop non-conceptual understandings<sup>12</sup> and experiences of meditation objects, at the beginning of a practitioner’s meditation practice, a practitioner is reliant upon spiritual information. Gyatso (1995) writes, “Every pure Dharma realization arises in dependence upon meditation, and successful meditation depends upon correct instructions” (p. 26). Interview participants’ language is especially revelatory about the role of spiritual information in their practice of meditation. When describing their meditation practice, participants always mention that they are meditating *on* something. For example, Prudence says, “Any word [of *Joyful Path of Good Fortune*] you could take and meditate on” and “I’m just leaving my heart open and meditating on

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<sup>12</sup> Non-conceptual understanding here can mean, in a more general sense, where an object is apprehending directly rather than through a generic image (Gyatso, 2014).

it” or Rachel says, “I do formal meditation on the Lamrim”. The use of this preposition signals a contact between the mind and the spiritual information.

In *Joyful Path of Good Fortune*, Gyatso also describes in detail the practice of meditation stemming from the information practice of contemplation. Taking the example of the object of bodhicitta<sup>13</sup>, he writes, “When this meditation induces in our mind a strong intention to become enlightened for the sake of others we hold this thought clearly and single-pointedly for as long as we can, acquainting ourselves with it more and more closely” (p. 60). Through the practice of contemplation, the practitioner develops a generic image of the object in the mind to the best of their ability and then attempts to keep that object generated in the mind without the mind being distracted by other things. Through keeping the mind single-pointedly concentrated, there comes an eventual experience that the meditator and the object become of the same nature, like water mixing with water, or as Gyatso describes later “our mind is actually turning into its object rather than just observing it” (p. 504). This experience of becoming spiritual information will be explored in the next chapter.

#### 4.2.2.3 Remembering Dharma

This understated information practice is perhaps one of the most important, especially in the context of everyday life. In the teachings on training the mind (*lōjong*) there is an instruction from Geshe Chekhawa (1102-1176 CE) to “train in every activity by words” (Gyatso, 2002, p. 55). This aphorism suggests training the mind by actively remembering spiritual information. Without remembering the Dharma as one goes about their day, there is no way to use it to change one’s mind. The information practice of remembering Dharma involves actively bringing spiritual information to mind, perhaps on the basis of an environmental or mental cue, an instruction or statement from the Dharma that one has previously memorized or encountered. What may be brought to mind may be information-like information such as a direct quotation from scriptures, or

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<sup>13</sup> Bodhicitta derives from the Sanskrit words “bodhi” referring to enlightenment and “citta” meaning mind or heart. It is defined as a mind that seeks the goal of Buddhahood not only for one’s own liberation from suffering, but for the liberation of suffering of all sentient beings.

realization-like information, the feelings, sensation or experience that has resulted from familiarization with written or oral information.

Gyatso echoes this advice in *Joyful Path of Good Fortune* where he instructs to remember the Dharma soon after receiving teachings or reading Dharma instructions so that they have a likelier chance of being remembered. He writes, “make an effort to recall what we have heard or read soon after a discourse has finished or after we have finished reading a chapter of a Dharma book. We can do this several times at intervals” (p. 32).

This spiritual information practice was frequently mentioned by interview participants. Lindsay recounts her experience with remembering the Dharma:

I try to remind myself about Dharma in everything that I do, especially when I’m a “you’re not making me happy” green-eyed bitch. Or if I’m working with a difficult client, I remember that this person is going through some difficult karma right now, have a little more compassion. I do, in my daily life, try to incorporate it into everything.

Remembering the Dharma is particularly important when unpleasant feelings are arising in the mind, such as Lindsay mentioned when she is believing that someone else is causing her unhappiness. While remembering Dharma instructions word-for-word is often helpful for practitioners, Lindsay’s experience shows that practitioners may remember the “essence” of some of the information such as her self-reminder to “have a little more compassion” instead of memorizing Gyatso’s instructions on how exactly to train in compassion as they presented in one of his books.

#### 4.2.2.4 Memorizing Dharma

In *Joyful Path of Good Fortune*, Gyatso describes ten activities that practitioner can do with the Dharma in order to remain focused on it and its meaning throughout everyday life. One of these is “memorizing words of Dharma” (1995, p. 456). Practitioners are often made the suggestion to memorize root texts, important scriptures and liturgical practices. The purpose of memorizing Dharma is to be able to recall it at a later point, especially in situations where it is possible to put those teachings into practice in everyday life. It is meant to provide freedom from porting around the actual physical manifestations of the texts when not engaged in formal study, or to have this information



within the mind to engage in the practice of giving dharma in formal and informal settings. It is an intrapersonal information practice because it is not accomplished in a social setting and it involves internalizing the words of Dharma into memory. In the interviews, Joanne mentions her practice of memorizing of some of the Dharma teachings. She says, “But now I see the value in learning lists. This is really boring, to do all the lists and I can’t remember all the lists, but hopefully I’m living the list. See, I had to spend my life memorizing, so I had to get to this stuff and memorize it. It wasn’t really a big deal”. In Joanne’s statement regarding lists, she is referring to the fact that Buddhism has been called a “religion of lists” (e.g. Three Higher Trainings, Four Noble Truths, Five Omniscient Wisdoms of a Buddha, Six Perfections, Eight Auspicious Symbols, Eleven Reversals, Twelve Dependent-Related Links, etc.). Joanne’s statement also reveals the connection between the information practice of memorizing spiritual information and its application in everyday life which is the spiritual information practice of remembering Dharma.

#### 4.2.2.5 Studying Dharma

Studying the Dharma is, in reality, a combination of different information practices, just as study in another academic discipline is the pursuit of acquiring knowledge or learning a skill. However, it is included here because it was frequently mentioned in both Gyatso’s text and by interview participants as an important aspect of their spiritual practice, and because it involves the usage or engagement with spiritual information.

In *Joyful Path*, Gyatso uses “study” as an information practice that is separate from the practice of meditation, but that includes other information practices such as reading, listening, or memorizing. In essence, it is an umbrella term for those information practices that would normally be included in a definition of studying in an academic context. To give an example Gyatso (1995) writes, “We need to study and meditate on actions and their effects” (p. 74) or “We need to study the inner science of Buddhadharma<sup>14</sup>. If we master the subjects of inner science, we shall attain special realizations which are the inner fruits of our study” (p. 502). Gyatso conceptually

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<sup>14</sup> “Buddhadharma” means Buddha’s teachings.

separates the actions of studying from the practices of mediation, further reinforcing the idea that it only involves those information practices that have traditionally been associated with studying.

Study was often mentioned by interview participants as an information practice they engaged in because many of them were participating in the study programs offered by Kadampa Centres (Foundation Program or Teacher Training Program). As was mentioned in the introduction to the dissertation, these programs are designed for the systematic study of Buddhist philosophy and practices through the study of Gyatso's commentaries. For example, when asked about their spiritual reading practices, Josh, like others was reading for the express purpose of studying. He says, that he reads works of Gyatso's "Because I'm studying it in a study program". Interview participants gave evidence to the different information practices that they would employ under the umbrella term of "studying". They mentioned receiving teachings by listening to oral teachings and contemplating them. Prudence recounts "receiving weekly lessons that we listen to and we do readings, and a weekly meditation" while Joanne mentions her participation in the Special Teacher Training Program where "you have to do the two hour classes and you have to think about that", which suggests that study, like the information practices of reading and listening mentioned earlier, are information practices employed before the practices of contemplation.

#### 4.2.3 Practices from other everyday life information behaviour models / theories

##### 4.2.3.1 Information encountering

Information encountering was a type of information phenomena first discussed by Sandra Erdelez (1995, 1997). It can be understood as a "a memorable experience of an unexpected discovery of useful or interesting information" (Erdelez, 1999, p. 26) and often occurs in an everyday life context (Erdelez, 1999). There is evidence of information encountering being a part of Buddhist practice in *Joyful Path of Good Fortune*. If a practitioner is making an effort to view her or his reality according to the Dharma, then spiritual information can be encountered in her or his own everyday experience. Gyatso (1995) writes:

With Dharma wisdom we can find a teaching in everything, and all things increase our faith and our experience of Dharma. Milarepa said that he regarded everything that appeared to his mind as a Dharma book. All things confirmed the truth of Buddha's teachings and increased his spiritual experience. (p. 171)

While the information that is encountered is not textual information, which is normally studied by Erdelez and other information behaviour scholars, experiences can be equally informative and be useful or interesting according to Erdelez's definition of information encountering.

In the interviews, participants mentioned encountering spiritual information in a broader sense as in encountering the opportunities to be able to receive information at teachings. Steve mentioned that "three different friends told me about a public talk that the US Spiritual Director was giving and when three separate friends from separate circles told me about it, I thought something must be up in the universe and I went". Prudence also mentioned that she felt like she had "set up the karmic path" in a previous life for the teachings to come into her life. Information encountering in these religious contexts were perceived to be mediated by forces larger than themselves.

Participants also mentioned encountering information in online settings. Facebook was mentioned by Michelle as a regular place that she encountered spiritual information. She describes her experience:

Well, I really, really love a Facebook page of Geshe-la and there is someone, very kind, who posted just a few lines of a page of Geshe-la. This is this what talks to me the most. I'm in my daily life every day. Everyday there is a quote. I always seek for it. I want to know today what Geshe-la wants me to know. I take it that way. In books, we talk about many things. It's hard to put it all into practice at the same time. So, when I just have a quote, it's easier for me to say, this is what I'm going to practice today.

As Michelle mentioned information encountering in this setting is especially beneficial because of the way the whole of spiritual information available to her is presented to her in "bite-sized" segments. The nature of the Facebook timeline is that it is constantly in a state of creation, leading to unexpected discoveries of information and given Michelle's testimony, she often finds the spiritual information that she encounters to be useful.

#### 4.2.3.2 Information avoidance

Information avoidance (or sometimes information blunting, ignoring, or rejecting) is an information practice wherein individuals purposefully avoid being exposed to or receiving information to avoid or relieve mental discomfort or dissonance (Case et al., 2005). Before some information behaviour scholars took up this aspect of human information behaviour, the discipline of psychology was productive in exploring people's proclivities to either monitor or blunt information (Miller, 1987). Within information behaviour, this phenomenon is understudied, but has been incorporated into Wilson's (1999) information-seeking model as well as Johnson's (1997) in health information-seeking contexts. When studying information avoidance, Narayan, Case, and Edwards (2011) noted that it is a common aspect of everyday life information practices and that there are generally two types of information avoidance: active and passive. Active information avoidance is defined as "a habituated long-term behavior that is exhibited when a person avoids certain kinds of information that they encounter in their everyday lives from being processed cognitively for so long that it becomes a passive and involuntary behavior" (Narayan, Case, & Edwards, 2011, p. 5) while passive information avoidance is the opposite, defined as "a short-term behavior exhibited when a person avoids certain kinds of information that is thrust upon them occasionally under non-trivial circumstances" (ibid.).

Similarly to Narayan, Case, and Edwards who note that information avoidance was used within the sphere of religious issues by their study participants, information avoidance was an information practice employed by my own study participants. Primarily, study participants demonstrated active information avoidance in three manners: (1) avoidance of spiritual information at the beginning of their spiritual practice; (2) avoidance of Buddhist spiritual information outside of the NKT; and (3) avoidance of spiritual information when under the influence of delusions or when suffering.

One of the characteristics of Western Buddhism, including the NKT, is that many of its adherents are converts from traditional Western religious traditions such as Christianity or from no religious tradition. So, when they encounter Buddhism, there may be a period of transition when there are competing ideas between the original worldview or system or thought and the Buddhist worldview which results in the nascent practitioner in avoiding

spiritual information through the development of doubts. Gyatso (1995) writes about the doubts that may arise when beginning to study and practice Dharma:

When we first listen to or read Dharma we have many doubts because Dharma contradicts our wrong views and incorrect assumptions and makes us undecided about them. This kind of indecision is a sign that we are beginning to develop wisdom...if we receive Dharma teachings without every developing this kind of doubt, there is no way to gain conviction in the teachings (p. 321)

Gyatso ultimately views these uncertainties on the side of the practitioner as a positive thing. In a similar manner, interview participants also exhibited information avoidance stemming from uncertainty. Michelle recounted her first experiences at her local Kadampa Buddhist centre where she ended up practicing information avoidance. She says:

I don't think I went to learn about attachment to get over it, it was like I think will learn something good, and I will not be alone. This was the goal. I remember after two hours there I slept, but intentionally, not just fell asleep, I laid down on the floor and slept. It was too much for me. There was too much stuff. Maybe I was stubborn or confused about all that stuff.

Joanne also recounts a similar experience when beginning her practice. She followed the advice of her teachers at the time to put certain teachings "on the shelf" until later, effectively practicing information avoidance. She says:

Even when I first went into Kadampa I would feel stuck when I learned something and then I learned the image of putting it on the shelf and looking at it later. [My friend] and I both said we'd do that. Just put it on the shelf and now I pull things off and I ask, what was the problem? Or I misinterpreted it.

Following Joanne's statements and Gyatso's writing, practices of information avoidance at the beginning of a practitioner's Dharma practice can often be temporary until practitioners are able to effectively engage with the information.

Information avoidance was also demonstrated by interview participants when they expressed their feelings and opinions about their spiritual path and the spiritual advice that they received from others outside of the NKT. Carla recounts her experience with a Jehovah's Witness and expresses her opinions about the qualities of her spiritual tradition that ultimately forces her to avoid spiritual information from other traditions. Carla says:

I feel like I don't need anything else. I had a Témoin de Jehovah [Jehovah's Witness] that came to my door this morning and I opened the door a little bit, and they said they want to talk about consolation, to help people make less sad. I said, no thank you, I don't need that, I have everything I need. I was feeling like that! It came like that! I have everything I need. And sometimes people talk about other groups that I have read anything else. When people try to give me books to read from other groups, even from other Spiritual Guides, I just feel like, no thank you, I have everything I need. I already have too much for my capacity to read. I don't want to mix.

The modern religious or spiritual environment (even within Buddhism) encourages or tends towards syncretism or eclecticism (Robinson, Johnson, & Thanissaro, 2005) in choosing or following a spiritual path. By following one path to the exclusion of others, the practice of information avoidance is practiced so that one path can be maintained.

The third instance when active information avoidance is practiced is when practitioners are under the influence of delusions or are in a state of suffering. Michelle recounts her experience of actively avoiding Dharma information when she was mentally suffering. She recounts:

Intellectually, I know that I need Dharma the most when I suffer a lot. But, in that time when I'm very ugh [painful sigh] and there is so much suffering I don't feel like Dharma will help. So, it's hard to answer because when I need it the most, it's when I suffer a lot. But when I am in this state, I don't feel like I need it. My boyfriend suggests, maybe you can meditate. But, I'm like, you don't understand I'm suffering! This is not the problem! [laughs].

Information avoidance is actively practiced in these situations because the delusions or mental suffering interfere with the ability to rationally use the information that has been previously received.

Finally, it is important to note that the practice of information avoidance is a positive or neutral activity which is conceptually different from the negative information practice of "rejection of Dharma" which is a negative information discussed in section 4.2.5.1.

#### 4.2.4 Liturgical information practices

There are several formal practices that can be performed as part of a practitioner's practice of Dharma. These can be performed individually as part of private practice or together with other practitioners as part of a Sangha. These often involve chanting or

reciting texts, prayers, mantra recitation and time for contemplation and meditation. Tantric practices are specifically called *sādhana*s meaning “method of accomplishment”, that is, a formal practice or method to become an enlightened being. Some practitioners have taken vows or daily commitments to accomplish certain realizations, and thus these formal liturgical practices are an important aspect of the everyday life of Kadampa Buddhists. These formal practices provide a structured opportunity to engage in a variety of spiritual information practices such as contemplation and meditation. Below are some information practices that are liturgical in nature that are not covered elsewhere. Some aspects of these liturgical practices can also be removed from the formal context and used as part of informal practice.

#### 4.2.4.1 Reciting Dharma

Recitation of the Dharma is a simple information practice that involves repeating spiritual information that is provided in a written format either with the aid of a visual text or from memory. After the historical Buddha’s death, his followers would recite the Dharma from memory to retain the lineage of teachings and Dharma was often recited when the Sangha gathered (Morgan, 2010). Reciting Dharma can also be an aspect of the spiritual information practice of remembering Dharma which can be performed in everyday life. In *Joyful Path*, Gyatso (1995) writes about the use of recitation of Dharma in practitioners’ daily lives: "To help us do this we can recite lines that remind us of the practice while we engage in any of our daily activities" (p. 440). Following Gyatso’s instructions, this information practice is possible to perform at any time of the day and functions to remind the practitioner of the Dharma. Formal practice is another context in which recitation occurs. In the interviews, Katrina mentions that a significant aspect of her formal practice every day is the recitation of Dharma scripture. She says, “What I do, my daily practice every, I recite the Essence of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra. I do that every day”. Elsewhere in her interview, she expressed a desire to realize the Buddhist teachings on emptiness, which is what the Perfection of Wisdom sutras teach. By reciting this information, she believes it brings her closer to her goal. In the NKT, recitations are performed in the local vernacular (in the context of this study, recitations are performed in English). Audio recordings of some recitations are made available by

Tharpa Publications, the NKT's publishing arm, as a means of supporting the information practice of recitation.

#### 4.2.4.2 Venerating Dharma

Physical manifestations of the Dharma teachings in books are often venerated as holy objects (Schopen, 2005). They are believed to be physical manifestations of Buddha's speech and Buddha's enlightened mind. In the NKT, a shrine that acts as a locale for spiritual practice is considered incomplete unless there is a Dharma text upon it. The Dharma texts are venerated themselves in order to increase the practitioner's faith and respect in the teachings. At the beginning of every liturgical practice, practitioners go for refuge, or make a determination to do for refuge to the Dharma. In other words, they make a determination to rely upon the spiritual information provided by Buddha. Then as a means to actualize this determination Gyatso (1995) suggests in *Joyful Path of Good Fortune*:

By going for refuge to the Dharma Jewel we are committed to acknowledge any Dharma scripture<sup>15</sup> as an actual Dharma Jewel. We need to respect every letter of the scriptures and every letter of explanation of Buddha's teachings. We must treat Dharma books with great care and avoid walking over them or putting them in inappropriate places where they might be damaged or abused. (p. 218)

In essence, venerating the Dharma is venerating spiritual information. Dharma texts are treated with respect because they are the instructions that Buddhists believe lead to permanent happiness. To treat the texts otherwise would be equivalent to disrespecting the content of the physical manifestations of the teachings as well.

In the interviews, some of the participants expressed praise or awe for the teachings having already begun to practice venerating the Dharma, deeming them praiseworthy and valuable in their lives. Prudence recalls, "I remember being so in awe of every single paragraph, every sentence. Five hundred and thirty pages of pure Dharma!" while Carla

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<sup>15</sup> For example: Dharma books, *sādhana* booklets, any written liturgical materials, or artistic works with Dharma text. In other words, a Dharma scripture may be defined as anything containing Buddhist spiritual information, regardless of its extent.



says, “It’s like a treasure for me. I have all of them [all of Geshe Kelsang Gyatso’s written works] except for two...Sometimes I look at them and [happy sigh]”.

While many of the spiritual information practices above have either focused on, or utilized, solely one type of spiritual information (e.g. reading Dharma only involving information-like information), it is in the practice of venerating the Dharma where Dharma’s dual nature, being both scripture and insight, is recognized actively.

## 4.2.5 Negative information practices

### 4.2.5.1 Rejecting the Dharma

While the majority of the information practices involved in Buddhist spiritual practice are perceived as positive and are encouraged to practitioners to engage in, there also exists some information practices that are not encouraged, such as “rejecting the Dharma” and its synonymous cousin “holding wrong views”. Indeed, Gyatso (1995) calls rejecting the Dharma “the great fault” (p. 23). These two negative practices are intrapersonal; they primarily occur within the mental continuum of the practitioner. Generally, this information practice occurs after one has received the spiritual information either orally or in a written format. In response to receiving this information, practitioners reject the spiritual information by claiming that it is false and then continuing to hold their erroneous existing view. Gyatso (1995) describes this information practice: “Holding a wrong view is a state of mind that is like a door closed and locked against Dharma. It is a mind that clings stubbornly to a view that denies the existence of any object that it is necessary to understand in order to attain liberation or full enlightenment” (p. 127). There is an attempt to persuade the practitioner that it is not logical to have a spiritual motivation to end their suffering or attain spiritual realizations while simultaneously rejecting the information or tools that lead there. Negative information practices are not “negative” in absolute terms but are so called because they are counterproductive to being successful on the Buddhist spiritual path.

## 4.2.6 Prerequisite minds and intentions

A majority of Buddhist information practices are done with the explicit intention to change attitudes and worldviews, as is encapsulated by Michelle’s statement: “I’m

working hard to think differently.” This involves generating by means of effort positive or virtuous views, intentions and determinations that are otherwise unfamiliar or ‘unnatural’ to the untrained mind while simultaneously abandoning negative or unskillful views that exist currently in the untrained mind. A Buddhist employing information practices as part of their spiritual path would train in these views, intentions and determinations alongside or as a precursor to their engagement in spiritual information practices. Like the “negative” information practices mentioned above, “correct” or “skillful” are not absolute or universal descriptors. Instead, they have a specific meaning in the Buddhist context meant to guide the reader into engaging in actions that lead to specific results. Again, there is an underlying attempt to persuade the reader that they cannot simultaneously progress along two paths headed in opposite directions: one of virtue and one of non-virtue.

#### 4.2.6.1 Adopting views / abandoning unskillful views

In order for information practices to be effective as possible in creating change in an individual, the spiritual practitioner is instructed to develop special ways of viewing the spiritual instructions, the teacher and the practitioner themselves. By holding these views, the practitioner is assured that they are performing the spiritual practices correctly without an incorrect or impure motivation. Gyatso (1995) writes, "The mind of the student is pure if he or she is free from holding wrong views, has faith in the Spiritual Guide and in the Dharma that is taught, and has a correct motivation" (p. 3). This means that the practitioner must generate within their minds these special recognitions by abandoning wrong views in relation to the Spiritual Guide and the spiritual information as well and adopting a positive view instead. This must also be accompanied by a correct motivation.

In *Joyful Path of Good Fortune*, Gyatso writes:

Whenever we listen to or read Dharma we should cultivate six recognitions:

1. Regarding ourselves as a sick person
2. Regarding Dharma as supreme medicine
3. Regarding teacher as supreme doctor
4. Regarding Dharma as cure
5. Developing conviction in Buddha Shakyamuni as reliable
6. Developing a strong wish that Dharma will flourish. (p. 32)

These recognitions employ a medical analogy to more easily understand the recognitions to be developed since an average person would understand these concepts rather than perhaps the more exotic concept of a guru-disciple relationship. The six recognitions that should be generated can be divided into view on self, the instructions, and the teacher. These six recognitions stem from the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism. The First Noble Truth recognizes that suffering is ubiquitous and perpetual in samsara. The Second Noble Truth recognizes the cause of this suffering, the delusions of ignorance, attachment, and aversion afflicting the mind. The Third Noble Truth suggests that in order to cease suffering, one should cease the causes of these delusions. The Fourth Noble Truth offers the path of the three higher trainings (training in higher moral discipline, concentration, and wisdom) as a method for attaining these cessations.

The first recognition, “regarding ourselves as a sick person,” instructs the practitioner to change the view of them self in accordance with the first two Noble Truths: that they are an individual that is suffering will continue to suffer because they are sick with the disease of the delusions.

The third and fifth recognitions instruct to regard the teacher as supreme doctor and to develop conviction in the reliability of Buddha Shakyamuni are special recognitions of the teacher of spiritual information. These recognitions accord with the Third and Fourth Noble Truths. The Buddha is an individual who, having completed the path himself, is able to identify the precise causes of suffering and provide instructions on how to eliminate those causes. In essence these recognitions about the teacher are about faith. Buddhist faith cannot be characterized as a type of blind faith, but is rather better understood as confidence, usually developed through investigation and personal experience of the teachings as efficacious. When the teachings reveal themselves to be trustworthy, confidence in the teacher develops.

The second and fourth recognitions to regard the Dharma as supreme medicine and to regard the Dharma as cure are recognitions to be cultivated about the spiritual information itself. These recognitions are related to the Fourth Noble Truth, that they are special instructions to free oneself permanently from suffering. The special recognition is that these are not ordinary instructions or ordinary information but are extremely rare and precious. Evidence of this view being adopted by spiritual practitioners engaged in

spiritual information practices can be seen in section 4.1.4 above where interview participants described their views on how the Dharma was not information.

The sixth and final recognition, to develop a strong wish that the Dharma will flourish, encapsulates the five other recognitions. Seeing this as an effective system to free oneself from suffering, one hopes that this will spread to benefit others.

Interview participant Amanda discussed the role of these recognitions in her spiritual practice. When discussing her ability to fulfill her spiritual goals and wishes, she says:

I have to believe that. If I don't believe that then I don't have the faith, don't have the motivation, I don't believe it! If I don't believe I can actualize, then I have to say that I don't believe in Dharma. I have to believe that to give me everything I need to move towards that!

Amanda recognizes the power of adopting special views and recognitions, the power of faith, as a necessary component of her engagement in spiritual information practices. Movement forward with engagement in spiritual information practices ceases without these recognitions.

#### 4.2.6.2 Correct motivations

Generally, before any engagement in a spiritual information practice, it is customary to pause and develop a correct motivation before engaging in the practice. For example, before reading, meditating, or contemplating, a virtuous or positive motivation is developed in the mind. Generating these motivations at the beginning 'colours' the following information practices with a positive intention. Gyatso mentions the development of a correct motivation before the information practices of giving Dharma (from the side of the teacher) and receiving Dharma (from the side of the listener). He (1995) writes, "To develop the best motivation the Teacher leads the recitation of the prayer of going for refuge and generating bodhichitta" (p. 37).

The purposeful cultivation of a motivation before engaging in a spiritual information practice may also suggest that one could engage in these practices with a different motivation as Gyatso says "best" motivation rather than "only" motivation. However, Gyatso also warns of the downfalls of engaging in spiritual information practices with an incorrect motivation. In the following example, he notes that engaging in spiritual

information practices with a deluded mind (here of exaggerated self-importance) will ‘colour’ the practice in a negative manner rather than a positive manner. Gyatso (1995) warns, "If we listen to or read Dharma instructions with such an attitude of self-importance we shall not derive much benefit" (p. 316), demonstrating that a virtuous motivation is all but necessary when engaging in spiritual information practices.

As mentioned above, the two best correct motivations are renunciation (a wish to escape samsara, the cycle of delusion and contaminated rebirth) and bodhicitta. Even between these two motivations, bodhicitta is considered superior since it includes the mind of renunciation, but rather seeks renunciation for oneself and others rather than for one’s self alone.

#### 4.2.6.3 Determinations

In a similar manner to changed views and correct motivations, virtuous determinations can be made before engaging in spiritual information practice. Instead of ‘colouring’ the information practices like correct motivations do, determinations function to provide and develop the mental energy to engage in and sustain an information practice. The practitioner recognizes a virtuous or spiritual goal, and then holds in their mind their strong wish or determination to attain that goal. In *Joyful Path*, Gyatso suggests that the practitioner trains in the determination "I must develop the Dharma Jewel in my mind" (1995, p. 211). Here, Dharma Jewel refers to the realizations attained through engagement in spiritual information practices, or the Dharmas of insight. Thus, the determination in this precedes engagement in information practices and helps to sustain them until the goal of engaging in them is achieved.

#### 4.2.7 Other necessary factors related to engaging in spiritual information practices

##### 4.2.7.1 Frequency

Unsurprisingly, the frequency in which spiritual information practices are engaged in is important for attaining spiritual realizations. Inconsistent application of spiritual instructions will not lead to the same results as those applied in a more rigorous manner. In Gyatso’s (1995) *Joyful Path*, he very nearly always includes instructions for

meditators to engage in spiritual information practices “again and again” or “over and over” until results are achieved. For example, Gyatso instructs to engage in the spiritual information practices of listening to and reading Dharma instructions with an undefined but great frequency. He (1995) writes, “We need to listen to and read Dharma instructions many times. Our listening and reading are not complete until we have gained all the realizations of the stages of the path to enlightenment” (p. 29). The importance of the frequency of engaging in spiritual practice is often taught through the analogy of training in a music instrument where an undefined but great amount of time must be spent training before one becomes a virtuoso.

Interview participants mentioned frequency as a component of their engagement in spiritual information practices. Prudence says:

Well, the wonderful thing about Geshe-la’s writings is that every time you read something, it’s like reading it for the first time. It’s like “I knew that, but I forgot”. It’s always dawning, isn’t that beautiful. I must remember to read this over and over and over again every day, but there’s so many things that are like that. I’ll take an especially beautiful paragraph and read it over and over again.

Prudence’s statement reveals not only that frequency is an important consideration for engaging in spiritual information practices but also draws attention to the process of learning or personal transformation that is taking place in the interval between instances of the information practice of reading. With each repetition of the information practice, new meanings are uncovered, layers of interpretation are revealed as a sort of unveiling of different levels of truth or subtlety from within a new perspective or worldview that has arisen due to further lived experience or spiritual training. This new learning only arises from information practices that have been engaged in more than one time.

#### 4.2.7.2 Concentration

Gyatso (1995), in *Joyful Path*, defines concentration as “a mind whose nature is to be single-pointedly placed on a virtuous object and whose function is to prevent distraction” (p. 476). This definition of concentration here in particular is reserved for Buddhist spiritual contexts. Concentration is to be understood not merely as focused attention to a task, as it is generally understood, but rather within the context of meditation where the mind is literally attempting to be single-pointedly engaged with an object to the exclusion

of anything else. When Gyatso refers to the object of concentration as a virtuous object, he means a virtuous object of meditation.

Since the function of concentration is to prevent distractions, by focusing on a meditation object, eventually excessive mental activity or business will subside. Gyatso (1995) writes, “When we become free from the turbulence of distractions our mind becomes clear and still and we can observe our object of meditation clearly” (p. 371). Thus, concentration also functions to make the meditation object easier to ascertain and to hold with the mind. Concentration necessarily accompanies successful spiritual information practices in the Buddhist context. Without concentration the mind is unable to focus, for example, on reading a text so that the meaning is retained, on developing a meditation object through contemplation, or on holding a meditation object in formal meditation and thus developing continuum-like and realization-like information.

Interview participants also recognized the importance of developing concentration for success in their spiritual practice. At the time of the interviews, Greg noted he was attending classes at his local centre which was featuring a series on developing concentration because he felt specifically “that’s an area that I feel needs improvement”. Greg felt that he needed more information about how to develop concentration in a spiritual setting and more practice on developing these states of mind.

Finally, concentration is the lynchpin of attaining and maintaining *permanent* insights and realizations. When perfect concentration is attained through training to a mental state called *tranquil abiding*, it is impossible for the mind to forget its object (Gyatso, 2014). In other words, engaging in spiritual information practices combined with the power of concentration, permanent changes in the mind and in perceptions are possible.

#### 4.2.7.3 Obstacles to Dharma practice

In this context, obstacles are barriers to engaging in spiritual information practices. In the information behaviour literature, obstacles or barriers to information practices are addressed as unfortunate but “expected” aspects of information seeking or retrieval models. McKenzie (2003), in her model of everyday-life information seeking, recognizes the presence of barriers in both connecting to information and information sources as well as barriers to actually engaging with or using information (p. 28). Obstacles or

barriers to connecting to or engaging with information may include barriers that derive from beyond the individual such as socio-cultural barriers including class and economic status (Dervin, 1999). There may also be intrapersonal barriers to successful information seeking. For example, Kuhlthau (2004), in her Information Search Process model recognizes affective and cognitive barriers such as confusion, frustration or doubt that could be present in the minds of information seekers.

Gyatso mentions obstacles to Dharma practice in *Joyful Path to Good Fortune* which can be understood as obstacles or barriers to engaging in spiritual information practices. He (1995) writes, "In fact, to accomplish any virtuous action we need some degree of concentration because concentration overcomes obstacles to our practice such as mental and physical discomfort" (p. 484). Gyatso only mentions obstacles in a broad manner, characterizing them as either relating to mental and physical problems or issues. Instead, he focuses on the solution, the development of concentration which was mentioned above as a necessary component to engaging successfully in spiritual information practices. In other words, with perfect concentration, barriers to connecting with information or information sources, or putting this information into practice would not exist. The strength of the concentration would overcome any perceived obstacles.

Interview participants were asked about what they perceived as the greatest obstacles in their Dharma practice. Similar to Gyatso's mention of mental and physical obstacles, interview participants primarily mentioned barriers to engaging in information practices that were personal in nature, relating to the state of their minds or bodies, rather than social barriers. Mental obstacles were of two types: unsettledness or affective.

Many participants mentioned that the obstacles to engaging in spiritual information practices were predominantly the unsettledness of their minds. This unsettledness may be the result of varying personal circumstances. Kyle laments, "Sometimes your mind won't settle for days at a time. [You're] too tired, or you've been distracted or very deluded". This unsettledness naturally leads to an inability to concentrate and focus on successfully engaging in spiritual information practices. Additionally, according to Buddhist psychology, delusions function to make the mind unsettled and unpeaceful (Gyatso, 2014). Kelly and Katrina also mention also mention mental obstacles to their Dharma practice, but theirs tended toward more affective mental obstacles. Kelly



mentions that her greatest obstacle is her lack of effort in engaging in spiritual information practices. She mentions that often this “effort is sometimes hard to conjure up”. This lack of mental willpower prevents her from engaging in spiritual information practices. Interview participants often viewed this lack of effort as a personal fault and as a result, participants had negative views of themselves and their spiritual practices. For example, Katrina mentions a perpetual feeling of guilt that she feels when not engaging in spiritual practices. She relates, “I always have the little bird with the guilt going ‘you know, you should do this’”. These negative self-perceptions can also be considered a combination of unsettled and affective obstacles since the negative self-perception is a delusion (in this case an exaggerated and negative deception about their status as practitioners which makes the mind unsettled) as well as affective since unpleasant feelings are often involved.

Finally, Vanessa, being an older practitioner, mentioned bodily discomfort as an obstacle to her Dharma practice. She says, “Outside obstacles are my body, my painful body”. Physical discomforts make it difficult to engage in formal Dharma practice such as meditation since it is often difficult to sit in a posture conducive to meditation or simply because the sensation of bodily pain distracts from engaging in information practices.

### 4.3 Existential and spiritual motivations for information practices

While the above sections in this chapter responded primarily to the first research question, this next section begins to respond to the second research question: “Do existential questions or concerns drive New Kadampa Buddhists to seek Dharma information?” and explores the information needs and motivations for information seeking of New Kadampa Buddhists. An information need can be defined as the “the motivation people think and feel to seek information” (Cole, 2012, p. 3). Both psychological and sociological perspectives on information need have been explored as the basis for these needs (Cole, 2012). A model for information need that has been particularly influential has been that of Taylor (1962). Taylor’s model is particularly useful in spiritual, existential, or religious contexts because he begins with unarticulated, visceral information needs which may be characteristic of needs at this existential level rather than models that begin with needs already formed in the mind. Taylor (1962)

describes these semi-unconscious needs: they “may be only a vague sort of dissatisfaction...it assumes eventual importance in the inquirer’s mind, it is probably inexpressible at this stage, except as a dissatisfaction” (p. 392). The following are accounts of the motivations (i.e. information needs) of Kadampa practitioners. In their accounts they mention explicitly needs that they have formulated articulately in their minds. However, they also suggest that there is a more nebulous underpinning to these needs that is hard to define except as a general feeling of unhappiness or dissatisfaction, in accordance with Taylor’s description.

#### 4.3.1 Motivations from interview participants

In the interviews, participants were asked directly and indirectly about their motivations, needs, or desires when engaging in their Dharma practice. The interviews began with interview participants’ recounting of their story about how they met the Dharma (which is a common occurrence when meeting new practitioners) and their original reasons for coming to the practice. Other reasonings for why they were doing their practice were often mentioned in the course of the interview. Sometimes these were explicit or they could be logically inferred. Again, understanding spiritual and religious motivations for engaging in information practices involves interpreting religious practices as information practices as was demonstrated above.

Motivations were mentioned earlier in section 4.2.6 as something that virtuously colours spiritual information practices and are cultivated alongside information practices, but the motivations mentioned are primarily the experiences of interview participants in their everyday life context and which have, for the most part, preceded their cultivation of virtuous minds.

##### 4.3.1.1 Seeking happiness / reduction of suffering

Perhaps the greatest reason or motivator that individuals engaged in their Dharma practice, and thus decided to engage in spiritual information practices, was the desire to seek happiness and reduce their suffering. As Gyatso (2016b) suggests, this wish is pervasive and of paramount importance to individuals. Buddhist teachings suggest that all living beings wish to be happy and avoid suffering permanently, and that all bodily and mental actions can be traced back to this wish. Notably, this motivation to seek

happiness and avoid suffering was mentioned as part of interview participants' accounts of their first encounters with the Dharma where they were seeking a spiritual method to solve their problem of unhappiness. Rachel, Julia and Nathan were particularly elucidative about their experiences:

I guess I started practicing because I was enormously unhappy and looking for some alleviation of that suffering and Buddhism kept on popping up in my life. (Rachel)

It was great, and I noticed that if it could lift my mood when I was sitting here in this rainy nasty place, trying to write this dissertation, then that was it. That was my first inkling that I wanted to check out more. (Julia)

The other one was a kind of dissatisfaction with everything that arrived in my life. I've been trying to find, to figure out, new sources of satisfaction for myself, sources that came from inside rather than from outside. That's been a great motivation for me to practice and that's the way I articulate my initial practice to my initial questions. (Nathan)

It is clear from these statements that participants had a desire or motivation to seek out a way to end their unhappiness, low mood, or dissatisfaction. However, in these accounts it appears that information-like information was not directly needed or sought according to a more traditional understanding of an information need. Eventually, however, these motivations would lead interview participants to spiritual information via engaging in the information practices of reading or listening, or others. One can instead understand these motivations as a need for realization-like information, a need for an *experience* stemming from the pervasive and important need to be free from suffering and unhappiness. From this need for an experience comes actions, notably information practices.

More specifically, some participants indicated that they were seeking a sense of peace of mind which motivated them to engage in spiritual practices. Again, participants were seeking an experience rather than tangible information-like information. In the Buddhist tradition peace of mind is synonymous with happiness so again participants were seeking happiness and wishing to avoid suffering, albeit here with more specificity of what they were seeking. Indeed, Rachel equates peace of mind and happiness when she recounts that "what I was looking for was more peace of mind, more happiness". Kyle also notes that his motivation early in his practice was because he needed to "find a sense of peace."

Interview participants also expressed having a motivation to avoid suffering in everyday life contexts (rather than at the beginning of their practice in the examples above).

Michelle and Julia both recount their reasoning to engage in their spiritual practice when they are not feeling well or are actively suffering. They say:

When I don't feel good, when I suffer a lot and I'm deluded. I don't want to do my daily practice. But it's wrong, because it's the time I need it the most....Every time I feel stress, which is a lot, I ask, "what can I do, what should I do?"  
(Michelle)

When I'm suffering. When I have a problem that I need to solve, or if I'm feeling out of sorts, or down. It helps. I use it every day, so it's sort of preventative, too. I don't like to wait until I need it, I like to do it every day. (Julia)

Michelle's statement also suggests that while needing an experience as a motivator for engaging in spiritual information practices is partially undefined or nebulous, it still prompts coherent questions which attempt to direct the resolution of the need.

#### 4.3.1.2 Personal or spiritual development

Interview participants also mentioned that they engaged in their Dharma practice because they wish to advance themselves spiritually or improve themselves. This was expressed as a general desire to improve themselves, or as a wish to meet specific spiritual goals.

In regard to personal improvement, both Josh and Madeline mention that they want to be better people. They recognize, explicitly and implicitly, perceived negative qualities in themselves and wish to remove those qualities from their personality. They state:

That's why I practice Dharma. Because it improves the quality of my life....I would like to be a kinder person. I think in my life I was very selfish, especially in my personal life, in my relationships. (Josh)

Ultimately, it was how to be a better person, how to be a better friend, a better person in society. (Madeline)

Madeline explicitly connects her wish for personal development to the spiritual information that she is receiving, spiritual information that provides the answers to actualizing this development. The teachings provide instructions on how to be a better person, a better friend.

The Buddhist path is goal-orientated, so it is not a surprise that interview participants have begun to adopt this goal-orientated attitude in their spiritual practice. Interview participants expressed a variety of spiritual goals. Several participants mentioned that they had the goal of becoming a Buddha, a being that has attained the ultimate goal of the Buddhist spiritual path, enlightenment:

For me now I practice it because I truly believe that I personally will need to attain enlightenment at some point in the future, I don't know when that's going to happen, but also that that will benefit myself and others. (Rachel)

I am reading because I want to be one [a Buddha]. After reading it, I gain more merit and wisdom. (Kelly)

I have these wonderful books to help me out with the situation. Of course, I don't just want to cope with reality, I want to get out of this reality. That's the ultimate goal. I don't know if I'm going to get it this life, but I will try. (Josh)

I still want to get off this life-wheel. (Lindsay)

For the sake of clarification, Josh's goal "to get out of this reality" is another way of mentioning enlightenment, to be free of *ordinary* reality, that is correct the mistaken appearances and conceptions that are the root of samsara, the cycle of delusion and contaminated rebirth. Lindsay's statement, her desire to "get off this life-wheel" expresses this desire as well.

Some interview participants also mentioned more specific spiritual goals on the Buddhist spiritual path. Katrina expresses a wish to attain a realization of emptiness, a significant and difficult realization to attain on the Buddhist spiritual path. She says, "And then, the Essence of Wisdom sutra the whole thing to emptiness is all in that sutra. And I want that in my [mental] continuum". Greg, on the other hand, expresses a spiritual goal to develop his concentration (implicitly, to develop it to perfection). He explains:

It depends on what I feel needs to be improved in my life. For instance, at the moment I'm attending a series of classes focusing on concentration, because that's an area that I feel needs improvement. I'm not attending the class on compassion because I feel that's an area I have a lot of experience with.

Again, many of the interview participants have explicitly linked their spiritual goals (ultimate and otherwise) to their engagement with spiritual information, recognizing it as a necessary component to their spiritual development. As a corollary, spiritual

information practices are necessarily a significant component of spiritual practice. Furthermore, Greg's and Katrina's statements also suggest that it is an experience within their being which is ultimately desired to resolve or fill the need for information. According to Greg, he has a lot of experience of compassion within his mental continuum, that is, an experience of realization-like information; as such, he feels he does not have a need to engage in spiritual information practices in regard to compassion. Katrina recognizes that resolution of the need takes place within her mental continuum.

#### 4.3.1.3 Existential motivations

Other significant motivations mentioned by interview participants were existential ones. Existential motivations are concerned with participants' present human existence *at the level of existence itself* rather than at the level of "ordinary life". Existential motivations are concerned with Being and not Being. They are often a response to the unavoidable and uncontrollable situations that accompany existence as a human being. Kyle, Nathan and Joanne relate their experiences with these motivations:

Well, the pressing question for me is that ordinary life appears quite meaningless and so it appears especially meaningless within the context of birth, old age, sickness and death. So, for me, engaging with the Dharma is about trying to find a way to respond appropriately to that existential truth, to not shirk that question, to actually find a meaning, find a way of living that is meaningful in light of those. (Kyle)

Yeah, for instance, there is a main question that lead me to the spiritual path. It was about death. What is death? Why do we die? What happens after death? To me, Dharma is a great way to prepare myself for death and to be conscious about what death is and to help others dying in a way. Yeah, to confer meaningful, a better meaning to my life according to the possibility of Dharma that may arrive every day. (Nathan)

Uncertainty, I think we've all experienced uncertainty, and that's probably been the quest from the time I was young: what the hell am I here for? What am I here to do? And not knowing the root, so I searched very hard for a root. (Joanne)

A significant characteristic of these existential motivations is a search for existential meaning, or rather, a search for an experience of existential meaningfulness when considering the implications of their human lives—namely their mortality. The needs here were often framed in the form of a question. Kyle, Nathan, and Joanne's statements suggested that they believed that answers to these questions—whether information-like

information or realization-like information—could be found if one looked at the existential level. They believe that this is where truth could be found. Then, as a corollary to this, a better “everyday life” can be lived as a result.

## 4.3.2 Motivations from un-satisfactoriness

### 4.3.2.1 Un-satisfactoriness with other systems

It has become clearer that these motivations for engaging in spiritual practice, and thus engaging in spiritual information practices, are frequently being framed as a sort of question by participants and that these motivations are, in a sense, destined to seek an answer. Interview participants suggested that part of the reason why they decided to look to the Buddhist path, and the Kadampa Buddhist path in particular, was because of the lack of answers, or a lack of a satisfactory response, by other religious traditions that they have encountered in their pasts. The majority of interview participants in this study had experience with other religious traditions, especially Christianity. In fact, it was Christianity that many of the interview participants found lacking. They were unsatisfied with the “answers” to life’s big questions that they previously believed or used. Some participants explained their reasoning for finding that Christianity did not have the answers:

I was born into Catholicism and it never really got on me. I like the community that it gave me growing up, but it never really resonated with what I felt was really going on. (Lindsay)

I would read about bad things happening to good people. This doesn’t make sense! What’s the reason? Whenever I would question, I went to Catholic schools, whenever I would question the priests and nuns they would say “that’s just the way it is, we don’t question God” and I said, “why?” and no response. (Prudence)

I have always been seeking for the truth of things. The Bible doesn’t sufficiently answer most of my questions... Well, in Genesis, where the brothers killed a whole village off, because one guy raped his sister (Dinah), I didn’t see how a loving God could support such actions. And in Proverbs where they talk about how animals that had bestiality performed on them were destroyed. How is that compassionate? It is not the animals’ fault that happened to them. (Kelly)

Interview participants cited intellectual and theological doubts as well as moral objections to the religious information they had received in the past, which are not

dissimilar to other reports of why individuals have left Christianity (Wright et al., 2011). As was mentioned in the introduction, adherents having converted is a prime feature of Western forms of Buddhism since many were not raised in Buddhist cultures. Thus, unsatisfactoriness with the spiritual information provided to Buddhists before their conversion may factor into their decision to convert.

Not only did Christianity provide unsatisfactory answers, but also other forms of Buddhism. Steve says that he prefers to attend Kadampa teachings: “If I can go, I’ll just go. I know it’s better than the Vietnamese tradition, I know it’s better than Shambhala which I’ve tried. It’s better than Zen Buddhism. I will just go to Kadampa if it’s the night that I’m in that city.” Steve as well as Joanne in a later quotation in the next section felt feelings of un-satisfactoriness stemming also from other conditions. They, rather, relied upon their preference or their feelings of fitting with the tradition and its teachers and teachings.

#### 4.3.2.2 Failed to make sense

Many accounts of the unsatisfactoriness of other spiritual information and traditions included instances where interview participants described some sort of sense making process that had failed. Interview participants hinted at the fact that the spiritual information that they had been provided in the past failed to accomplish its goal to provide them with spiritual, religious, or existential meaning and that this is part of the reason why they find these other systems to be so unsatisfactory. Prudence, Josh, and Joanne describe their experiences. Evidence of this lack of sense making is italicized.

Roger: What didn’t you like about Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormonism?

Prudence: *They just didn’t ring true with me.* Like, with the Jehovah’s Witnesses, I’d invite them in and we’d sit and have tea. All they could do is quote from the Bible. I’d ask them to close their Bible and tell me what you believe in your heart. And I asked them questions that they couldn’t answer so I decided that this wasn’t for me. *I just knew*, something deep in my heart told me what was the truth. (Prudence)

I have been disenchanted with religion since I was a kid. I did not like Christianity [Christianity] growing up because I did not like it when they told me that life ended and somehow you went to Heaven or Hell. *It didn’t make sense to me.* (Josh)



The only thing available in the '60s was Zen, which never quite fit me, the koans. I thought a lot of that was intellectual claptrap. I did do that. I just kept reading and reading and always felt that I was heading towards something. I never really got into New Age, *it never really seemed right to me*. I kept on reading, and then of course what became available was things like Chögyam Trungpa and the Dalai Lama but *it still wasn't the total fit for me*. And then I discovered Kadampa in a very odd way. You know the story about the poster. I saw the poster and I knew, I walked around the corner and I knew I had found my teacher. (Joanne)

These responses suggest that making sense is a large component of spiritual information seeking and use. Indeed, the responses suggest a need or a gap that was inadequately bridged. Despite the use of her terminology here, whether Brenda Dervin's Sense-Making accurately describes this phenomenon will be explored in the next chapter. The importance of sense making in spiritual information seeking is further highlighted later in this chapter in reports of Buddhist spiritual information making sense to practitioners as an outcome of spiritual information practices.

### 4.3.3 Changed motivation

Interview participants were directly asked whether their motivation had changed since they had first begun practicing Dharma. Indirectly, there was an attempt to see if there were additional motivations for engaging in spiritual information practices that participants possessed. Participants did indicate that their motivations had changed.

My motivation improved in the sense that I can reach enlightenment. Eleven years ago, I didn't know that. (Vanessa)

Oh yeah. I didn't really know about what the end goal of a spiritual path was at that point. I didn't really know much of anything. As it builds over the years, we know so much more about the practices and how it is really attainable in this life. And certainly, that's the motivation now rather than to go listen to some nice teachings. It is clearer now, for sure. (Jennifer)

Yeah, at first it was all about my own suffering, to try to alleviate it, and over time it's become wanting to be enlightened, it's becoming a higher training. I like teaching it to other people and using it in my [work]. It's gotten bigger. It still helps me with my own suffering. (Julia)

I'm seeking to be liberated. I'm seeking to renounce samsara completely, and I'm seeking to arise as a Deity and I hope I'm doing all I can to actualize that. (Amanda)

Participants demonstrated an increased confidence in their ability to complete the Buddhist spiritual path, as well as a greater familiarity and understanding of the Buddhist spiritual path. While some practitioners mentioned higher spiritual goals as preliminary motivators for engaging in spiritual information practices (as was evidenced in section 4.3.1), more often than not, these higher motivations, such as the wish to become enlightened being developed over time. This is also evidence of some practitioners' motivations moving from the mundane (e.g. a search for happiness) to be more overtly religious. Additionally, as was evidenced by Amanda's response, these desires become more *specific* overtime. While earlier some participants expressed a general desire to become an enlightened being or Buddha, Amanda's language hints more specifically at her practice of Buddhist tantra, wherein the practitioner imagines and meditates on themselves transformed into an enlightened being. This practice of self-generation is said to mimic the actual experience of becoming enlightened.

#### 4.3.3.1 Motivation for other beings

One changed motivation that was frequently mentioned was a motivation that included other living beings. In a similar manner to the increased ability and expansiveness of some practitioner's Dharma practice over time, some have also been motivated to move beyond themselves and do their practice for the sake of others in addition to their original or other changed motivations. Carla, Michelle, and Vanessa explain how things have changed for them:

Yes, because at the beginning it was only for myself. And with time, I discovered that there were other people around. A motivation to help others and I found that really meaningful too. To be able to help a little bit and to have a wish to get enlightened and be really able to benefit others and to have a realization of that. It's something that keeps popping up in my head, as a cue, a motivation. There is so much suffering I see. I see more suffering now that I have more tools to do something in my mind. Before I was seeing suffering too, but now I realize that suffering is everywhere. I want to help. (Carla)

When I went there, I took the Bodhisattva vows so now my motivation has changed, now it's not just I want to be happy, but I want to help others which I didn't care about before. Now I want others to be happy. I'm not very good at it, but I try. It's a motivation to control my mind, and then I will be happy and help others to do the same. (Michelle)

It's one of the reasons why I enrich my practice with a meditation on refuge, meditation on bodhichitta, meditation on purification. When things are going bad between my daughters, it affects me. (Vanessa)

Participants seemed to have incorporated the Mahayana Buddhist teachings as realization-like information within their mental continuums. The Mahayana teachings are focused on engaging in Dharma practice for the benefit of others, so this explains why it is mentioned as a changed motivation for some practitioners. Given that the median amount of years practicing Dharma amongst participants was roughly eight years, this is not surprising; practitioners have had some time to develop some in-depth familiarity with the teachings as information-like information as well as realization-like information.

#### 4.4 Outcomes of spiritual information practices

This next section begins to answer the third research question: “Is a Dharma realization an outcome of the use of Dharma information?” In this section, the empirical support to begin to answer this question is offered while the next chapter furthers these empirical results with a more philosophical analysis. It is this research question in particular that begins to probe the relationship between the Dharmas of Scripture and the Dharmas of Insight, or the relationship between information-like information and realization-like information.

Achieving the outcomes of information practices are usually the reason why people engage in them in the first place. As was evidenced above, interview participants expressed goals and ambitions to improve themselves personally and spiritually. They even expressed specific or exact spiritual goals that they wished to achieve. Kari (2011) clarifies, “If information does not lead to anything, it is a waste of space and time” (p. 63). Kari (2011) defines information outcomes as “any process that ensues from receiving a message - whether it happens intentionally or not”. He continues, “there has to occur some kind of informing or being informed which then enables or gives rise to an outcome. It is as if the information is more or less converted into something different by the actor” (Kari, 2011, p. 63). Kari studied the information outcomes of spiritual information in a 2011 study, however the outcomes he discovered were based on a study of texts purportedly transmitted from extraphysical beings rather information outcomes reported by human beings, which are primarily reported in this dissertation (a limitation

which Kari acknowledges) rather than those derived from spiritual texts themselves. However, the outcomes presented below would still fit into Kari's category of *effects of information* whereby "information can change various - most frequently human - phenomena." (2011, p. 70). This dissertation in particular seeks to investigate the effect of spiritual information on the human being (see Research Question 3). In particular, this dissertation seeks to examine and make clearer Kari's requirement of the "informing or being informed" on human phenomena as a constituent aspect of producing an information outcome.

#### 4.4.1 Outcomes related to mood

After engaging in spiritual information practices, interview participants reported positive effects. Notably, they reported their mood had improved and that they were experiencing mental calm, happiness, and positive feelings. Participants reported both short-term and long-term outcomes related to their spiritual information practices. Considering short-term outcomes which follow closely to the practices themselves, Madeline describes the outcome of decreased stressed following the spiritual information practice of remembering Dharma. She relates:

every experience is like a Dharmic lesson; however you look at it. So really, it's all the time [laughs]. But it's a good thing, it's not a struggle. It's like when I see it and it shows up for me, it totally decreases my stress, literally everything just dissolves.

Her daily experiences trigger remembrance of the Dharma which brings feelings of calm and decreases her stress.

Steve's experiences, on the other hand, were more indicative of a long-term outcome where there was lasting experience of calmness over time which slowly transformed him. He relates a conversation with a friend that he had:

A friend noticed it first before my husband. I go, "what have you noticed?". [He replied,] "Rather than ten balls in the air you only have three balls in the air now. Why don't you ask [my partner], he would know more." And so I did and he goes "yeah, you've definitely slowed down".

Steve's experiences suggest that outcomes of information practices, just like spiritual or existential information needs may be unconscious to the individual for a time, just like

effects of everyday experiences or learning are not conscious to individuals until there is a reason or other effect to become aware of them.

Interview participants also mentioned feelings of happiness, meaningfulness and a reduction of their suffering as an outcome of their spiritual practice. Carla, Amanda, and Michelle all explain the ways that their spiritual practice has impacted and transformed them:

I'm so much more peaceful inside. After a practice I just feel good, much better. Always. The way I'm thinking, peace of mind. (Carla)

People looking at me wouldn't see anything different. But me, inside myself, it's given me an absolute confidence, even though I still get scared sometimes, it's given me an absolute confidence that my life has a deep meaning and that there's something within me working very hard to actualize itself and it can't do that if I'm in denial or avoiding it, or avoiding the deluded states of mind that arise within me. (Amanda)

I feel that actually my life has never been this good. Even if there's obstacles and problems, I still feel that. But it's happened to my mind after I've taken refuge vows that I will never suffer that much. I will never suffer as much as I suffered before because now I have Geshe-la and I have Dharma practice and I have training my mind. I will never go to that stuff again, to that suffering. (Michelle)

Interview participants explicitly linked their feelings to their religious practice, even though they may not be able to exactly explain the internal mental processes that they experienced to affect such a change. The process between practice and outcome will be explored in further depth in the next chapter.

#### 4.4.2 Outcomes related to metacognition

Studies of meditation by psychologists and neuroscientists have lent evidence to accounts of improved metacognition in meditation practitioners. Metacognition is a type of mental activity wherein individuals develop and maintain an observer status to their mental and bodily awareness, thereby changing their relationship to their process of thinking (Shapiro et al., 2006). Researchers have found that expert meditators showed better introspective accuracy than novice meditators (Fox et al., 2012) and that "the human capacity to introspect is plastic and can be enhanced through training" (Baird et al., 2014, p. 1972).

Some of the interview participants described experiences of increased metacognitive awareness as a result, at least in part, of their engaging in spiritual information practices. There is spiritual information in the Buddhist tradition that instructs individuals on how to develop this metacognitive awareness (although it is not explicitly described as such). These instructions, combined with the information practices of meditating on Dharma and remembering Dharma, and the factor of concentration mentioned above in section 4.2.7.2. may lead to increased metacognitive skills. Travis, Rachel, and Nathan describe how these skills have improved:

It brought me back into the position of the observer and made me a more mindful participant. (Travis)

I really started to pay attention to what my mind is doing, and really starting to get a sense that I had some control over what I was thinking and what I was thinking was colouring how I viewed the world. It's been quite a relief to be able to take control of that. (Rachel)

I would say that the Dharma has been very helpful in trying to reduce those aspects that really effect your happiness. But I'd say that Dharma has definitely helped me be more conscious about those aspects. I'm still a controlling person. I'm still self-centred and suffering. I still experience frustration according to my high expectations on people, or of situations. But, I'm more conscious about it, and I have the methods to observe it, and to try to accept it, and to try to observe it. But Dharma has been very helpful and if you are conscious of that, then that is half the battle. (Nathan)

In addition to the “observer status” outcome that developed out of increased metacognitive skills, Rachel and Nathan also mentioned their improved control over their mental states which Flavell (1979) mentions is another metacognitive skill. With metacognitive control, Buddhist practitioners can direct their mental (and otherwise) into engaging spiritual information practices to affect further positive outcomes, creating a virtuous cycle.

#### 4.4.3 Outcomes related to worldview

In section 4.3 above, interview participants recalled their motivations for seeking spiritual information. In particular, they noted that they sought Buddhist spiritual information because other worldviews failed to make sense for them. That is, those sense-making schemes did not adequately match their experience or failed to provide an experience of meaningfulness or truth for them. In a related manner, interview participants mentioned

that a change of worldview was one of the outcomes of their spiritual practice, further suggesting a link between engaging in spiritual information practices and tangible spiritual outcomes. Prudence recounts the way that her experience has changed over the course of her practice (eleven years when the interview occurred). She says:

It's formulated the way that I look at things, way I feel about things to such a great extent that I feel like I'm practicing all the time, meditating all the time because whenever anything happens, I immediately put a Buddhist spin on it and I see the reasons for things and understand.

Her experience suggests that information is a central aspect to the construction of worldviews, that her application of the information practices of remembering and meditating are becoming increasingly inseparable from her performance of daily life. This finding—spiritual information and changing worldviews—will be explored in more depth in the next chapter, so limited examples are provided here.

#### 4.4.4 Social outcomes

Interview participants mentioned increased outward focus directed towards others as an outcome of their practice. Similar to the changed motivations mentioned by participants in section 4.3.1 wherein their motivations had changed to incorporate other people, participants noted outcomes related to their familiarization and use of Mahayana Buddhist information on developing love and compassion towards other living beings. Participants mentioned increased sociability, positive social attitudes like forgiveness and altruism, and an ability to, metaphorically, walk a mile in another's shoes.

I think it has helped me be less self-focused, to notice other people, and even people I don't know, having more kindness towards them. I think it's opened up that field. It used to be my friends, my family, my little circle and now I've opened it up more. I feel like I'm more compassionate. I think I'm more giving too. I see opportunities to give and take them more than I used to. (Julia)

Much more love with others, just feeling close to almost everyone I meet. My heart is open to people, of course there are a few exceptions where I don't feel like that right. It's like my mind has changed and continues to change. So, I was not really checking since the beginning whether something was changing. I wasn't asking if something was changing. But it was, I was just doing well in Dharma. (Carla)



Dharma has certainly helped in that regard because you don't take things so personally all the time. And you can see others' perspectives a lot more easily than I could before. (Jennifer)

These social outcomes are also long-term outcomes of spiritual information use. Participants mentioned these outcomes while talking about the long-term trajectory of their practice since its beginning. Jennifer's statement also suggests that these positive social outcomes are linked to changes in their worldview outcomes as envisioning another's worldview and integrating it into their own understanding and worldview is in itself a change of worldview. It further demonstrates a skill at adapting their worldview to align with Buddhist ideals.

#### 4.4.5 Self-reported caveats related to participants' outcomes

Despite the positive experiences and changes to their personality, mood, and worldview that interview participants mentioned as outcomes of their Dharma practice, interview participants frequently couched their experiences with warnings to the interviewer about how they felt about these experiences. Mostly, these caveats stemmed from self-doubt or humility and were about how they still possess imperfections in terms of their understanding and that their realizations were in progress, or incomplete.

I see from a broader perspective than what I used to; before it was so me-me-centred and I'm not saying that I'm perfect all the time, even now but it's better, it's better. (Prudence)

I don't have realizations yet, but I can't stop. Every time that I sit down [to meditate] I feel like something changes in me. I'm kinder with people. I wish would progress more, but I need to sit down more. But, my life in general, including my work, it has changed my life. (Josh)

Absolutely. You know I think just having more deeper wisdom and a deeper meaning to what's going on. I still don't understand the big picture and how we all got here, but it definitely has, you know, just shifted my consciousness, definitely more awake, alive in my body, in my mind, you know, maybe that's just something that we get with age, I'm not sure. (Madeline)

No interview participant proclaimed a fully complete realization of any of the teachings, and so these caveats then can be said to stem from the continuum-like information rather than the realization-like information that is existing within the mental continuum of the practitioners. This is not to downplay their efforts and achievements however, as



practitioners will spend a lot of time engaging in spiritual information practices and developing continuum-like information over the course of their whole practice. These findings also accord with Kari's definition of information outcomes as processes wherein individuals are constantly constructing their reality. He even warns that it is difficult to determine where the actual "end" is, where the outcome actually begins and ceases (2011, p. 63). The Buddhist path differs here—a perfect resolution and construction of reality is indeed possible, but since this idea is transcendental in nature, it is not surprising that it is not readily accepted as a potential resolution.

## 4.5 Chapter summary

This chapter demonstrated the informational nature of Buddhist practice—that Buddhist practice contains a variety of information practices which are essential to its functioning. This was accomplished through providing descriptions and examples of information practices in the Buddhist context through an analysis of a comprehensive text on the whole Buddhist path in the Kadampa tradition as well as from the experiences of twenty Kadampa practitioners.

In summary, this chapter demonstrated that within the Kadampa Buddhist tradition, information can be understood in different ways as information-like information, continuum-like information, and realization-like information and that information practices can be understood to be needing, seeking or using information on any of these levels. Next, a list of essential information practices within the Buddhist tradition was presented which introduced some "new" information practices understudied or not studied elsewhere in the information behaviour and practices literature such as contemplation and meditation. Remembering the Dharma was featured as an important aspect of Buddhist information practices. Interview participants in particular demonstrated through their experiences information practices that were also found in other models and theories namely information encountering and information avoidance.

Buddhist spiritual information needs were also explored. Participants described needs such as wanting to be happy, and not wanting to suffer and general wishes to improve themselves and attain spiritual goals. They also mentioned needs that were related to their existence itself. These needs often arose because interview participants found other

systems of thought to be unsatisfactory, and thus failed to provide an experience of sense or meaning to participants, causing them to need information which would eventually fill this need.

Lastly, information outcomes of the spiritual information practices of Kadampa Buddhists were examined. Many participants mentioned improved moods, increased metacognitive skills, and increased sociability, but often noted some doubt about these outcomes with a mention of their non-mastery of these skills.

## Chapter 5

### 5 Results, Part II: Connecting information need, use, and outcomes in Kadampa Buddhist practice: Enhancing and critiquing Dervin's Sense-Making

#### 5.1 Introduction

The previous section reported on the spiritual information practices engaged in by New Kadampa Buddhists while pursuing their spiritual path, by providing an inventory of these practices. It also reported on the needs and motivations of practitioners in regard to why they previously engaged in and continue to engage in spiritual practices, and on the outcomes that the practitioners experienced from having engaged in these practices. To discuss these aspects of information seeking and use without exploring their connections or interrelatedness would be an error. Therefore, this next chapter of the dissertation begins to explore these interconnections and further contributes evidence and discussion towards answering research question three: "Is a Dharma realization an outcome of the use of Dharma information?" It is in this chapter where primarily philosophical arguments are made towards understanding the relationship between the Dharmas of Scripture and the Dharmas of Insight.

These interconnections will be explored from a deep or profound vantage point and will borrow from three complementary perspectives. The first is Dervin's Sense-Making Methodology which was chosen because it provides a framework to help explain Buddhist spiritual practice as a series of everyday life information practices, and through the use of Buddhist spiritual information. The practice of Buddhism can be explained through the use of the Sense-Making Triangle where an individual encounters the gaps of human suffering and seeks to bridge these gaps through the use of Buddhist spiritual information, thereby creating new sense that adheres to the Buddhist worldview. Dervin's research and writing on Sense-Making is prolific; therefore the dissertation relied primarily upon foundational articles on Sense-Making that have since been republished in a 2003 anthology edited by Dervin and Foreman-Wernet. The anthology was used as the primary source material for the enhancement upon and critique of Dervin's Sense-Making.

The second framework is Martin Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics because of its ability to provide more insight into part of Sense-Making's metatheoretical basis. Both Savolainen (1999) and Kari (2001) have noted how Dervin is surprisingly vague about gap-bridging, a fundamental component of her theory and ultimately fails to describe how sense is actually made (Kari, 2001, p. 36). However, Dervin notes that individuals construct "interpretive bridges over a gappy reality" (Dervin, 1999b, p. 730; emphasis author's), suggesting that the crux of Sense-Making is a *hermeneutic* process. Indeed, Dervin credits aspects of Georg-Hans Gadamer's (a student of Heidegger's) writings on hermeneutics as being influential to her thinking on Sense-Making (Dervin, Foreman-Wernet, & Lauterbach, 2003, pp. ix-x). An application of Heidegger's ontological hermeneutical thought to Dervin's Sense-Making allows it to inhabit the existential realm whereby Sense-Making, as an ELIS theory, can be used to describe the roots of existential information needs and its connection to spiritual realizations wherein an individual's interpretation of a world--an individual's Being-in-the-world--is completely changed through the use of spiritual information. Heidegger's contributions to this explanation will derive primarily from his work, *Being and Time* (1927/1962). Budd (2005), in a paper exploring the potential of phenomenology for LIS, suggests that Heidegger's work would be especially helpful in exploring this connection between information and Being-in-the-world. He asks, "In what ways does being informed alter being in the Heideggerian sense? What are the processes by which a person could change being and existence? These seem like lofty questions, but there is a pragmatic element to them. If information gives shape to our thoughts and beliefs, what happens within us that results in a reshaping?" (p. 48-49). While Dervin's Sense-Making provides a foundation to understand how an individual is changed after being informed, Heidegger's thinking on the other hand provides descriptions of existential-level phenomena or concepts that allow this understanding to develop.

The last perspective is provided by Buddhist philosophy and psychology. Buddhism invites its practitioners to become intimately familiar with their mind and encourages them to investigate deeply the nature of reality. The Buddha, when he attained enlightenment, offered a diagnosis of the human condition and a method to overcome it. This perspective is seen primarily through the work of Stephen Batchelor (1983), Geshe Kelsang Gyatso's commentary to the *Löriq* text, *How to Understand the Mind* (2014), as

well as several of Gyatso's works from his corpus. In order to underscore the relevance of the Buddhist perspective as appropriate for discussion of the existential, it is important to note that the similarities between Heidegger's thinking and Buddhist practice have been long explored. Garfield (2015) notes that both Buddhism and Heidegger's philosophy are attempts at 'deep phenomenology, or "inquiry into the fundamental cognitive, affective, and perceptual processes that underlie, and which are causally or constitutively--biologically or metaphysically--responsible for those we find in introspection" (p. 180). An alleged statement of Heidegger's is that, upon reading one of D. T. Suzuki's books on Zen Buddhism, he remarked "this is what I have been trying to say in all my writings" (von Eckartsberg & Valle, 1981, p. 296).

Dervin's works on Sense-Making will primarily guide the incorporation of the two other perspectives in theorizing about the interconnection between information needs, use, and outcomes in a spiritual context. Dervin presents Sense-Making as a methodology "in the cracks" and so is generally careful about not making hard claims in regard to the epistemological and ontological certainties of the reality that the human individual in her metatheory inhabits. She instead chooses a middle-ground between, for example, subjective and objective and quantitative and qualitative. She explicitly mentions that Sense-Making is a metaphor "intended as a highly abstract methodological tool, a way of looking" (2003/1999b, p. 151). Because of this purposeful middle-finding, Sense-Making resists firm critiques about its metatheory since it is recognized as merely a tool, rather than a certainty. This lack of certainty ultimately allows for other perspectives to enter and make commentary on the metatheory of Sense-Making. Thus, having been "invited in," the perspectives of Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics and Buddhist philosophy will serve as an exploration and critique of Dervin's Sense-Making and everyday life information-seeking in general. Each section will examine the key areas where these three perspectives merge and offer the perspective of each to tease out new meanings and understandings of religious ELIS and ELIS in general.

## 5.2 Introducing Dervin's Sense-Making

Sense-Making was introduced by Brenda Dervin in 1972. It is a metatheory, methodology and method to discovering why people think the way they do and how they make sense of their lives. The basic goal of Sense-Making is to understand how

individuals negotiate living in an unpredictable world. Sense-Making relies upon the metaphor of the Sense-Making Triangle which outlines the three essential components of Dervin's Sense-Making theory: Situation, Gap, and Use. The Situation aspect involves an individual who, by nature, enacts the human mandate "to move through time and space" (Dervin, 1983, p. 7), and who is situated within a unique context, time and place, and brings with them their personal history and experiences. Gaps can be characterized as when an individual encounters a misunderstanding, a negative emotion or feeling, or a lack of knowledge and is forced to stop their movement forward as per the mandate. Gaps represent anytime when the sense that an individual was operating under fails to provide a satisfactory accounting for new experiences and thus the "individual's internal sense has 'run out'" (Dervin & Nilan, 1986, p. 21). Thus, to satisfactorily create new sense, the gap must be bridged. The bridging of the gap is accomplished through a "verbing". The focus in Sense-Making is on the *hows* of people's sense makings rather than the *whats* of people's sense making. As such, scholars have listed a multiplicity of ways that human beings can bridge the gaps they encounter. These verbings include for instance: got information, got help, got directions, went down a new path, decided to start over, or "observings, thinkings, idea creatings, comparings, contrastings, rejectings, talkings, sendings, agreeings, disagreeings" (Dervin, 1991, p. 64). Once the gap has been bridged, the "Use" aspect of the Sense-Making Triangle attempts to measure the use of the newly made (or unmade) sense as the individual continues to move through time and space fulfilling the human mandate until sense is unmade again through encountering the gap. Dervin and Frenette also refer to the Use stage of the Sense-Making methodology as "outcomes" (2003/2001, p. 333).

### 5.3 The human individual and its world

Dervin describes her human individual in a multifaceted manner, as being a "body-mind-heart-spirit living in a time-space" (Dervin, 1999, p. 730). This definition attempts to capture both the gross or material aspects of existence as well as some of the more subtle or deeper aspects simultaneously, allowing for Sense-Making to easily be used to understand how people make sense of their worlds through spiritual means. Sense-Making, while grounded in the context of immediate space-time allows for the presence of Sense-Makings that "transcend time-space and last beyond specific moments in time

space” (Dervin, 2003/1999b, p. 139) which has been demonstrated earlier through interview participants’ accounts of their lasting existential needs. This multifaceted nature of the human individual also introduces a certain level of impermanence to the human individual. Dervin avoids focusing on the fundamental essence and substance of the human individual, instead opting for a process-based understanding of the human individual which is “potentially changeable across time, sometimes orderly, sometimes disorderly; sometimes centered, sometimes decentered; sometimes flexible, sometimes rigid” (2003/1999b, p. 141). This impermanence is a foundation for the potential transformation of an individual. The Sense-Making metaphor does not function without an understanding of how individuals are able to change their way of viewing the world.

In Sense-Making, the human individual’s world can be understood in two interrelated ways. First, one can understand time-space as a context which contains both the temporal and spatial experiences of the individual “moving from a past, in a present, to a future, anchored in material conditions” (Dervin, 2003/1999b, p. 139). This spatial-temporal arena is important because it is within time-space where the human individual encounters the gap and where an individual is forced to make sense. An individual’s world can also be understood as the “situation” aspect of the Sense-Making triangle. Situations occur in space-time but are only specifically revealed and defined when movement forward through time-space has stopped at a gap (Dervin, 2003/1984, p. 260). Within a conceptualization of a human individual’s situation as part of the metaphor, scholars can consider an individual’s past history and experiences as facets of the individual that will inform the creation and bridging of the gap.

Ultimately, however, Dervin proposes an inseparability between the individual and its context. She writes that Sense-Making mandates simultaneous “attention to both the inner and outer worlds of human beings and the ultimate impossibility of separating them” (Dervin, 2003/1999b, p. 139). This is a perspective shared by both Heidegger and Buddhist thought.

To Heidegger, a human individual is called *Dasein*, which, in German, literally means “being there” (Harman, 2007, p. 2). The human individual is not conceived as an independent actor existing and acting in an independent world but rather as a presence which is in part determined by the world *Dasein* always finds itself in. *Dasein* is always

“being-in-the-world<sup>16</sup> and inseparable from the world” (Harman, 2007, p. 61), meaning that Dasein is never without a world, and that the individual and its world are “a unified structure” (Wrathall, 2006, p. 11).

Another characteristic of Dasein is that it is also always concerned about its own Being, it “is always an issue for it” (Harman, 2007, p. 60) and that it is Dasein alone which is able to “encounter the question of what it means to be” (Wheeler, 2011, s. 2.2.1., para. 5). Therefore, Dasein is able to conceive and act upon choices and possibilities related to its Being and Being-in-the-world. Furthermore, since Dasein comports (behaves, carries itself) toward Being, Dasein “relates itself to that understanding of its Being” (Wrathall, 2006, p. 12). Because comportment to Being is part of Dasein’s existential constitution, it should encourage scholars of human information behaviour and practices to comport themselves equally to their own and others’ Being, viewing information behaviours and practices as emanating from this primordial action. While Dervin’s Sense-Making at times probes near this depth (as will be further demonstrated), often other information behaviour research is consumed by studying the different ways in which human individuals *have* (e.g. keep, collect) information. Batchelor (1983) invites his reader to progressively explore knowledge and knowing (especially self-knowledge) as a vertical deepening towards ultimately understanding Being rather than as an obsessive mission towards a horizontal widening.

Heidegger, however, makes a stronger statement about the inseparability of the individual and world than Dervin does. While she and other scholars have accounted for the phenomenological perspective as well as provided a robust understanding of the contexts in which information practices are taking place, the paradigm still views individual and context much like a brick in a bucket, to co-opt Dervin’s metaphor critiquing information transmission (Dervin, 1983). Instead, Heidegger is suggesting there is a need to view individual and context as completely and entirely co-dependent and co-created. Everyday life, given its pervasiveness is not merely another “bucket” context that an individual finds itself in. Everyday life spills into and threads around other contexts such

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<sup>16</sup> German: *In-der-Welt-Sein*



as scholarship and work that have possessed a conceptual distinctiveness in the study of information behaviour. Perhaps it can be viewed as a conceptual context in which other contexts sit. It forces us to look for a different way to understand an individual's place in (their) reality.

Insights from the Buddhist tradition appear to provide support or clarification to the ideas presented by Dervin and Heidegger. First, in regard to the inseparability of human individual and context, Buddhist thought describes this inseparability through the Buddhist understanding of reality which posits that all phenomena lack inherent existence. That is, a phenomenon's true state of existence is one that lacks any independent existence from its own side or by its own power. Phenomena lack an abiding essence and instead are better described as dependent arisings. That is, they are better described as processes, constantly in flux rather than as a singular object with a permanent essence. Every phenomenon is dependent upon five things for their existence: their causes, their name, their parts, their basis of imputation, and imputation by consciousness (Gyatso, 2001). Outside of the dependence of these five things for existence, objects are unfindable. Although objects may *appear* to exist outside the mind, Buddhist teachings assert that this is a mistaken appearance. One cannot find phenomena existing outside of the mind, independent of the mind in the way it is believed to appear. It is impossible to find a phenomenon that is, in some way, not dependent on the five things listed above. While Dervin avoids making firm assumptions about the nature of human individuals choosing to view them in different ways at different times, Buddhism firmly takes this groundlessness as an ontological verity. Because all phenomena lack inherent existence and are all dependent-arisings, they all have the same nature which is called *sūnyatā* or *emptiness*. This includes both the personal inner space of cognitive and affective experience of individuals as well as the great variety of external objects. They are, as Gyatso describes, "of one taste" in emptiness:

Since all emptinesses are the same nature, the ultimate nature of a mind that is meditating on emptiness is the same nature as the ultimate nature of its object. When we first meditate on emptiness our mind and emptiness appear to be two separate phenomena, but when we understand that all emptinesses are the same nature we will know that this feeling of separation is simply the experience

of a mistaken mind. In reality our mind and emptiness are ultimately of one taste. (Gyatso, 2013, p. 138)

Echoing Heidegger's conception of Dasein, the individual and its world can be understood as one structure and inseparable. The analogy of a dream, which is often employed in Buddhist teachings as a means to understand emptiness, is helpful here to understand this unitary structure. In dreams, *both* the dream individual (sense and mental awarenesses and the appearance of the body) as well as the dream world are mere appearances to the dreaming mind. Since they are all created by the mind, they share the same nature. They can be understood as one structure, at least for the purposes of this analysis, because both emptiness and Dasein rely upon interpretation and imputation (functions of mind) for their existence.

The Buddhist account of reality and the subsequent understanding of the inseparability of the individual and reality relies upon the power of the mind to create our reality. Gyatso (2014) writes, "there is no creator other than mind" (p. 6). The mind's function is to perceive and understand objects, as well as to impute names upon objects. Without depending upon perception, understanding or imputation, phenomena are unfindable. In LIS's voluminous amount of scholarship on the nature of information, scholars have recognized that information is often a phenomenon that is closely tied to a person's subjective sense making or meaning making. While Dervin recognizes that "human information processing is inherently creative" (Dervin, 2003/1980, p. 34), many others have failed to link information so closely to their reality as Heidegger or as Buddhism has. In other words, they have failed to recognize the tremendous power of the mind to entirely shape and create the world. Consequently, they have failed to realize the tremendous potentiality of *information* to entirely shape and create the world. Information is not passive, like storing pennies in a piggy bank. The process of informing is active and continuous rather more like introducing a new thread into a working loom. A "unit" of informing continues to function within the mind and acting as a cause or condition for future moments of understanding or perception. This is where the link between information needs, use and outcomes begin in a Buddhist context: there is a recognition that the essence-less individual and world are co-dependent and thus are co-constructed through changes to the human mind. Human individuals can begin to

change their mind through the use of spiritual information such as the Dharma as a tool for reality-reconstruction, the process of which will be outlined in further detail below.

#### 5.4 Sense-Making as *Taking-as*: The power of interpretation and imputation

According to Dervin, humans are driven by their “human mandate” to “make sense without complete instruction in a reality, which is itself in flux and requires continued Sense-Making” (Dervin, 1999a, p. 332). Dervin also mentions other “human mandates” throughout her theorizing including “to move through time-space” (Dervin, 1983, p. 7) and “to reach out to the sense made by others, in order to understand what insights it may provide into our continuing human dilemma” (Dervin, 1999a, p. 332). Despite the lack of methodological clarity here, these other mandates are related to the first. The second speaks to the context and impermanence of the individual and its world (as discussed above) while the third speaks to the social character of human individuals who seek additional information and understandings from other humans. Regardless, these mandates point ultimately to an understanding that sense-making is a fundamental human activity, a view shared not only by Dervin, but by other scholars outside of LIS (e.g. Rapport, 2002; Chater & Lowenstein, 2016).

In Dervin’s Sense-Making theory, the moment sense is actually made is through the process of gap-bridging wherein the human individual attempts to overcome a gap or discontinuity in her movement through time and space, and thus to achieve some sort of outcome of the gap-bridging. However, both Savolainen (1999) and Kari (2001) note that Dervin is “strangely vague about gap-bridging” (Kari, 2001, p. 39) in her writing about the Sense-Making methodology. Kari (2001) elaborates:

[Gap-bridging] has by no means been elaborated to the same extent as the other phases. It is ironic that Sense-Making is concerned with almost everything that leads up to and succeeds Sense-Making but says practically nothing about what and how meanings are actually made by the actor. The approach skates over the intriguing outlooks of experiencing the mental processing of senses and its potential genre-bound character. (p. 203)

Ultimately, these scholars are asking, “how is sense actually made in Sense-Making?” Despite the above criticisms, Dervin (1999b) knows full well that Sense-

Making is an hermeneutical endeavor. She says “humans construct *interpretive* bridges over a gappy reality” (p. 730, emphasis author’s), as was previously mentioned. Her statement reveals that she believes the act of interpretation is the essential act that allows the sense-making individual to continue forward with their human mandate to move through time and space. However, scholars could benefit from an explanation from Dervin herself as to how hermeneutics fits exactly into the Sense-Making paradigm. In the meantime, this dissertation offers the beginnings of an answer, inspired by the ontological hermeneutics of Heidegger and the metaphysics of Buddhism.

Kari’s desire for more explanation on the actual process of Sense-Making can be fulfilled through Heidegger’s explanation of sense-making, or how things are intelligible to human beings. Heidegger, too, suggests that sense-making is a fundamental aspect of a human being. Heidegger explains that sense-making is an “a priori structure of our existential constitution” (Wheeler, 2011). That is to say, sense-making is not an act of will wherein an individual *decides* to make sense of something, but rather, it is a fundamental part of human individuals’ Being and Being-in-the-world. Making sense is determined by Dasein’s capacity to take other beings or entities in the world for the sake of something, for a purpose, or to fulfill an end. Other beings and entities in the world are always, pre-conceptually, taken *as* something. The act of Sense-Making therefore is a *taking-as* or is a determination of the as-structure of a being or entity in the world. Wheeler clarifies that sense-making is not something that Dasein *does*, but rather is something that Dasein *is*. He writes, “Dasein--human individuals’ being-in-the-world--is constituted by a capacity to take-other-beings-as” (2011, s. 2.2.1, para. 6). In other words, Dasein is not other than its ability to make sense. Sense-making is *Being*. Heidegger later explains that the act of interpretation largely depends upon Dasein’s temporality, its moving through time. The act of interpretation is dependent upon Dasein already finding itself *thrown* into the world (its past), and its future--a projection of its own possibilities for acting (Wheeler, 2011). The actual act of

understanding or interpretation is understood as *projection*<sup>17</sup>, which is a “manifestation of the taking-as activity that forms the existential core of Dasein's Being” (Wheeler, 2011, s. 2.2.7, para. 3). The projection of possibilities will be discussed later as part of its role in gap-bridging.

From a Buddhist perspective, the act of Sense-Making itself can be explained as an innate function of the mind. That is, the definition of mind includes a capacity to make-sense and to understand. In the Buddhist teachings on the mind (Tib: *lorig*), the conventional nature of the mind is defined as *clarity and cognizing* (Gyatso, 2016). *Clarity* describes the nature of the mind, while *cognizing* describes its function. Clarity is something that is empty, like space; it is a “lack of obstructive contact” (Gyatso, 2014, p. 5), and it never possesses form, shape, or colour (Gyatso, 2014, p. 5). Ultimately, clarity is the basis for perceiving objects (Gyatso, 2016, p. 31). It describes the nature of the mind as a thing which enables phenomena to be able to appear. Cognizing, the function of the mind, is synonymous for perceiving and understanding. Perception and understanding do not happen without *imputation* which names things, and thus brings them into being (recalling that phenomena are dependent upon their name for existence) (Gyatso, 2014). These two aspects of the mind are co-dependent, one cannot have cognition without a basis for cognition and one cannot have a basis of cognition without a cognizer.

Imputation, then, is the powerhouse behind the interpretive act according to a Buddhist perception. Imputation largely happens pre-conceptually as evidenced by the fact that all beings and entities have names when humans encounter them in the world, even for phenomena that are poorly understood--they still have demonstrative names like “this” or “that.” But imputation can also be a conceptual act where there is an active training in renaming or re-imputing to align more closely with Buddhist philosophy. An example of this would be imputing all living beings as our mother so that we are motivated to show them kindness. Imputation can be understood as analogous to *taking-as* wherein beings and entities cannot be but taken-as something, otherwise they would not exist as

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<sup>17</sup> The reader would be careful here not to confuse the Heideggerian notion of projection with the Freudian/Jungian understanding of projection. It is not to be understood as an individual perceiving qualities of its unconscious in others.

something. Alternatively, imputation has the same reality-creating function that taking-as has.

Understanding that the hermeneutic act is the essence of the Sense-Making process allows for a deeper understanding of Sense-Making. In particular, it offers ELIS an opportunity to understand information processing (read as interpretation) as an activity that is constantly taking place and as a *world-creating act* rather than one that is concerned only with a process of “order, interruption, recovery” (Weick, 2006, p. 1731), as characterizes the Sense-Making metaphor, and many other information-seeking models wherein a gap is identified as the main motivator for information seeking and use. This is not to say that the gap metaphor is useless, especially given the gaps and discontinuities that Dervin does indeed identify and has empirical support for, but merely that the actual act of Sense-Making is not reliant upon a gap to occur.

## 5.5 Dimensions of Care and Sense-Making as spiritual path

### 5.5.1 Introducing Heidegger’s notion of Care

Heidegger’s quest to provide an answer to the question of Being led to him ultimately describing and explaining Being, as Dasein, in its everyday life. Contrary to banal conceptions of everydayness, Dahlstrom (2013) is quick to remind that despite this, “everydayness embodies ‘the structure of existentiality a priori’” (p. 69), and thus the everyday is, or can be, a locale for the investigation of human nature and the ontological relationship between the individual and the world. As was discussed earlier, the interpretive act, *taking-as*, has the power to change Dasein’s Being-in-the-world, primarily because Dasein is essentially the interpretive act, this capacity to take-other-Beings-as. As a corollary, this means that Sense-Making, also described above as taking-as, likewise possesses this same capacity. This is supported by Buddhist metaphysics concerning the nature of the mind and how it creates reality through imputation. The everyday, then, is the arena in which this world-changing is enacted. This has implications for understanding information behaviours and practices in everyday life. In this next section Heidegger’s dimensions of care, which is part of Heidegger’s continuing analysis of Being, are paralleled and examined with some remaining aspects of Dervin’s

Sense-Making methodology in this dissertation: gaps, power, gap-bridging, and outcomes. Again, Buddhist metaphysics will provide support for the Heideggerian interpretation and critique of Sense-Making. While the first few sections introduced the triangulation of Sense-Making, Heidegger and Buddhism, these upcoming sections will also serve as a discussion of the responses provided by the interview participants. These sections move beyond merely explaining Dervin's Sense-Making through a Buddho-Heideggerian lens but will instead articulate the distinct connection between information motivations, practices and outcomes more directly to spiritual motivations, practices and outcomes through Heidegger's insights about the nature of human beings.

First, an understanding of Heidegger's notion of *care* (*Sorge*) is needed. Heidegger explains that care derives from Dasein, and its Being being "always an issue for it" (Harman, 2007, p. 60); Dasein is always comporting itself towards its own Being, as was noted above. Care is not strictly something that Dasein *does*, per se, although actions do occur as a result of care. Care takes into account Dasein's facticity (Dasein's already being found somewhere or taken up by something) as well as its possibilities for change and action.

In its most simplest form, Heidegger's care structure exposes what is of most consequence or importance to the human being. It exposes what the human being is concerned with or cares about. In Heideggerian terminology, it exposes the human being's circumspective concern and angst. In particular, this is exposed through the human being's future directionality or indeed their future aims, goals, desires, or ambitions. (Horrigan-Kelly, Millar, & Dowling, 2016, p. 3)

Heidegger's continued analysis of Dasein reveals that care has three interconnected dimensions: thrownness (*Geworfenheit*), fallenness (*Verfallenheit*), and projection (*Entwurf*), which will be explained in further depth below as they relate to understanding existential and spiritual motivations for information behaviours, understanding barriers and constraints on information behaviours, the progression towards bridging existential gaps, and attaining outcomes of information behaviours.

### 5.5.2 Life is suffering I: Thrownness, dukkha, and gaps

It is clear from the interview participants' responses that they indeed have spiritual or existential motivations for their seeking of spiritual information. It is suggested that two



of Heidegger's dimensions of care, thrownness and fallenness, when paralleled with Buddhist psychology and metaphysics can begin to explain the nature or origins of spiritual and existential information practices, precisely because these two systems of thought are in themselves existential approaches to examining and understanding life's experiences and the human condition. This section begins with an explanation of thrownness, while fallenness will be considered in the next (s. 5.5.3).

In his analysis of Being, Heidegger describes an imperfect Dasein in its everydayness. Heidegger's analysis of Being reveals an anxious, struggling, and distracted Dasein. At a fundamental level, Being-in-the-world is problematic and troublesome, and this imperfection of Dasein also is part of its existential constitution. Dasein is always finding itself *thrown* into Being-in-the-world. Or as Wheeler (2011) explains, the concept of *thrownness* defines the characteristics of "Dasein [is] having to deal with having-been-thrown into the world (s. 2.2.7., para. 2). In other words, it is *without choice* that Dasein finds itself constantly in a world, and is consequently responsible for its own Being, and for Being mattering to it. Blattner writes, '[W]e are 'subject to' life...it 'burdens' us in the sense that we cannot extricate ourselves from caring about it' (2006, p. 78). At an existential level, we are burdened by the fact that we exist at all. Withy (2011) writes, "That human life is such a business is the naked fact *that we are and have to be*" (Withy, 2011, p. 74, emphasis hers).

The Buddhist explanation of human beings' existential situation closely resembles Heidegger's explanation of Dasein as Being-thrown-into-the-world. However, the Buddhist account provides more detail about the nature of human suffering. The *Dharmacakrapravartana Sūtra* ("Turning the Wheel of Dharma" Sutra) recalls the story of Buddha's first teaching after his enlightenment on the Four Noble Truths (i.e., the truth of suffering, the truth of the origin of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering, the truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering). Thus, the first thing that Buddha taught about was about the suffering that permeates human existence. Buddha was required to explain suffering because he was aware through his own experience in attempting to solve the problem of suffering that his teachers had incorrectly identified its nature, and thus were unable to cease suffering altogether. Thus, Gyatso (2013) renders his translation of the First Noble Truth as "You Should Know Suffering".



In the Buddhist explanation, life is pervaded by *duhkha* (in Sanskrit, *dukkha* in Pāli). Duhkha is usually translated as “‘suffering’, ‘unsatisfactoriness’, ‘frustration’, ‘unhappiness’, ‘anguish’, ‘ill’, or ‘dis-ease’” (Bowker, 2003). Duhkha can be understood on many levels. First, there is manifest suffering, which Gyatso (1995) defines as “any unpleasant bodily or mental feeling” (p. 306). This is the pain that is most evident to human beings. This includes the whole range of unpleasant bodily and mental feelings from the mildest of annoyances to full-blown rage and from excruciating physical agony to the mild discomfort that the human body is always feeling. Next is the duhkha of changing suffering. Changing suffering derives from the mistaken view that external objects are a cause of happiness. For instance, when someone is hungry, they may eat something. The person eating experiences pleasant feelings while eating and the suffering of hunger goes away. However, if food was an actual cause of happiness, the more food that was eaten, only greater and greater happiness would arise. However, this is not the case. Logically, causes of happiness should only give rise to happiness and not to suffering. If said causes do give rise to anything other than happiness, then they are not a true cause of happiness. In the case of food, it eventually transforms into an object of revulsion, as one is not capable of eating ad infinitum. The true nature of the food is revealed: it is actually a cause of suffering. The pleasant feelings that were felt during the initial moments of eating was merely a diminishment of the suffering of hunger while indulging in the suffering of food. Changing suffering is when one exchanges one suffering for another while mistakenly understanding the object is a cause of happiness. Changing suffering reveals the truth that all external objects that human beings encounter are the nature of suffering.

The final aspect of duhkha is pervasive suffering. This type of suffering occurs because all phenomena--including human beings--have a conditioned existence, meaning that their existence is constantly subject to change, arising from a complex matrix of causes and effects. Because existence is constantly subject to change, all conditioned phenomena are impermanent. In everyday life, this means that every aspect of human beings' everyday life will eventually end in tragedy. Meetings and comings together will always end in parting. Youth will develop into old age, wellness and health will always transform into sickness, and being born means that death will one day death will come. Savolainen's ELIS model (1995) does a good job of capturing this impermanence.

The fact that one has to maintain the “way of life” at all, or in other words, keeping order of things and one’s life in general, is because things decay and change.

The problematic nature of human existence is compounded by the fact that most human beings do not live their lives with the awareness of dukkha; they believe and act in ways that do not reflect this truth of suffering. Ultimately, human beings suffer human sufferings because they have a human body and mind, they are trapped in a human situation from which they perceive they are unable to escape. Garfield (2015) writes, “Siddhartha Gautama’s genius was not simply to see that we suffer, or that many of us are unhappy. That has been noted many times by philosophers in many traditions. His genius was instead to see that dukkha is the fundamental structure of our lives...*to be human is to live in dukkha*” (p. 9, emphasis author’s). Dukkha then, is very similar to Heidegger’s thrownness. They both describe a human being struggling with the experience of being alive. The thrownness of Dasein limits its sense making to the world that is a constituent part of itself because Dasein cannot be thrown into anything but a world. Beyond the world, it is impossible to take-entities-as (thus those entities and beings do not exist). As a result, Dasein is left a problem-filled situation with which it has no choice but to try to make sense.

Dervin’s gaps also find a striking parallel with thrownness and dukkha. First, Dervin (2003/1991a) asserts that “the gap idea is a fundamental assumption...about the nature of the human condition” (p. 63). Her language here points to gaps being connected with human experience at a profound level. Gaps are disclosed to human individuals when the “mover sees movement as somehow deterred or fettered” (Dervin, 2003/1980, p. 44) through time and space. In other words, gaps occur when a human encounters discontinuity--a problem, a new situation, a decision--any time where sense has run out and new sense must be made. The gappiness of the human condition, while existential, is also pervasive. Dervin (2003/1999b) writes,

This discontinuity manifests itself in multiple ways: in the gappiness of the human condition with its gaps between external worlds and internals, time, and space; in the gaps between human mind, tongue, heart, body; in gaps between people at the same time; in gaps in a person across time; in gaps between structure and person, structure and structure. (p. 143)

Similar to thrownness and *duhkha*, Dervin takes as a metaphysical basis for her Sense-Making methodology an imperfect reality--one that is obstacle-filled, one that must be coped with. The term 'gap' itself evokes imagery of a pothole-filled existence.

Furthermore, like thrownness and *duhkha*, the human individual, the sense-maker has *no choice* but to navigate the gappiness of the human condition because human beings are sense-makers. Gyatso's (2018) words summarize the terror of the human condition:

Living beings have no control over their rebirths in *samsara*. If they were free to choose they would not take rebirths in which they had to experience miseries such as sickness, ageing and death but would choose rebirths in which they experienced only happiness and comfort. No one wants to suffer but everyone suffers without choice. No one wants to experience dissatisfaction but everyone experiences it without choice. No one wants to be sick but everyone falls ill without choice. No one wants to grow old but everyone ages without choice. No one wants to die but everyone dies without choice. No one wants to wander in *samsara*, but everyone does so without choice....The cruelty of *samsara* is such that in all these matters living beings are completely without choice. (p. 26)

The ultimate cruelty of the human condition is that humans must suffer it uncontrollably because they are human. Thus, at the level of existence, human beings can encounter gaps and attempt to bridge those gaps to an outcome. However, Dervin's attempt to make Sense-Making a methodology "between the cracks" (i.e., to capture the subjective and objective, the modern and postmodern, the qualitative and quantitative) leads her to be inconsistent with her characterization of the gap as simultaneously mind-created or existent in an external reality which a human individual comes across. For instance, she states that gaps are "always cognitive" (2003/1989a, p. 223), yet also states that "reality is discontinuous, gap filled" (2003/1997, p. 115) which are contradictory statements. However, in both a Heideggerian and Buddhist interpretation of gaps, self and world are co-created and thus Dervin's theoretical "between the cracks" problem becomes harmonized as both the inner and outer gaps are created by mind or simply by virtue of Being-in-the-world. It is perhaps in her language of gaps as being fundamental to the human condition (which captures both inner and outer realities), that this contradiction is redeemed.

But how do these existential gaps translate into seeking information on existential or spiritual topics and subsequently engaging in spiritual information behaviour? Dervin (2003/1980) sees "a direct connection between the kinds of situations people see

themselves as being in and the kinds of questions they ask” (p. 45). If one understands ‘situation’ as Dasein Being-in-the world (with its concomitant sufferings), then the human situation necessarily gives rise to questions about its nature. Indeed, Heidegger goes as far as to say that this questioning is part of the very nature of Being Dasein because Dasein’s Being matters to Dasein. It is this feature, Heidegger suggests, that is unique to human individuals. Batchelor captures the essence of this question, of Being mattering to Dasein. “Our very being becomes a question for us” (1983, p. 67), Batchelor suggests. The question is to fully understand the appearance of Dasein’s world and personal self. Furthermore, the interrogatory nature of questions and questioning points to their function as eliciting information (Searle, 1969), so necessarily, there is a need for information. As was explored above, both Cole and Taylor understand information needs as being subsumed in, or deriving from, more fundamental needs. If one takes this consideration, then one can understand that individuals may have different abilities to articulate their existential questions along a continuum from pre-articulate to fully articulate. Dervin then continues to say that “When this gap is articulated as a question, ‘information’ or ‘messages’ serve as fodder for constructing the answer” (Dervin, 2003/1989b, p. 54). However, as has also been explored, information does not simply mean information-like information, but may also include realization-like information.

Indeed, it is evident from the statements of the interview participants that they encountered some sort of gap that led to their pursuing the practice of Buddhism as a stop or challenge and then subsequently engaged in some of the information practices that form a large part of Buddhist practice as was presented above. Responses about their motivations for practice from Kyle and Nathan offer the most articulated questions.

These were originally categorized as “existential motivations” above. They stated:

Well, the pressing question for me is that ordinary life appears quite meaningless and so it appears especially meaningless within the context of birth, old age, sickness and death. So, for me, engaging with the Dharma is about trying to find a way to respond appropriately to that existential truth, to not shirk that question, to actually find a meaning, find a way of living that is meaningful in light of those. (Kyle)

Yeah, for instance, there is a main question that lead me to the spiritual path. It was about death. What is death? Why do we die? What happens after death? To me, Dharma is a great way to prepare myself for death and to be conscious about what death is and to help others dying in a way. Yeah, to confer meaningful, a

better meaning to my life according to the possibility of Dharma that may arrive every day. (Nathan)

Kyle's and Nathan's questions recognize the problematic aspects of existence made evident by suffering and interrogate them. They are attempting to make sense of their human existence. They see themselves stopped at the gaps of sickness at death and are seeking for answers so that they can bridge these existential gaps.

Next, the responses from participants whose responses were originally categorized in the "seeking happiness / reducing suffering" category offer a less articulated question. Nathan and Julia have not quite identified the characteristics of their thrownness or *duhkha*, yet they still have articulated that there is a gap--there is stopping of movement forward that is made present particularly when there is suffering. They reported:

The other one was a kind of dissatisfaction with everything that arrived in my life. I've been trying to find, to figure out, new sources of satisfaction for myself, sources that came from inside rather than from outside. That's been a great motivation for me to practice and that's the way I articulate my initial practice to my initial questions. (Nathan)

When I'm suffering. When I have a problem that I need to solve, or if I'm feeling out of sorts, or down. It helps. (Julia)

Each time both Nathan and Julia experienced gross suffering or dissatisfaction there was a discontinuity from the natural movement forward. Eventually, their suffering was motivation to bridge the gap of suffering in a new way.

The variance between individuals and even between the same individual (in the case with Nathan above having both articulated and unarticulated gaps) and the widespread nature of the gappiness of reality according to Dervin's own theorizing upon it offers a challenge to the way Sense-Making is often conceived, or at least studied: by focusing on one gap at a time in a linear manner. If the gappiness of reality is a pervasive aspect of reality, then a conceptualization of gap-bridging as a "one-at-a-time" occurrence is unrealistic. For example, Godbold's (2006) experiences with existential aspects in her life prompted a re-examination of this conceptualization. She writes:

Having first read Dervin's ideas some months after the unexpected death of my mother, I was immediately struck by the problem of an individual having a gap with no means to span it. Furthermore, that gap of mine remains: I still feel a need

for information about death in general and about my mother's death in particular, information that I believe I will never obtain. It is plain that in some sense, some gaps may never go away. Yet life goes on and I am not still shivering by the gap. Instead, there seems to be a human ability to juggle many gaps simultaneously. Some problems may be left to one side for a time while the individual focuses on other issues. (p. 7-8)

Her suggestion that humans have the ability to juggle many gaps simultaneously is applicable in a spiritual-existential context where humans may move back and forth between mundane and spiritual gaps. It is perhaps even a necessity to bridge the existential gaps, or at least begin to bridge the gaps in the “mundane” realm. It seems from Buddhist information practices explained above that the practices that make up Buddhist practice occur in everyday life, yet they are linked to existential motivations. Or, a sort of “Russian doll” effect may be present where gaps and series of gap bridgings are nested within each other. Existential gaps may be “long gaps” that span years, or perhaps a whole life time. In the meantime, a series of iterations of the Sense-Making triangle could be viewed together as a sort of composite bridging of a long gap, as is alluded to through Gyatso’s insistence on the repetition of Buddhist spiritual information practices. To support these ideas, Savolainen (2006) concurs in that bridges may be constructed in phases and only partially crossed (p. 1121) while Dervin (2003/1991a) notes that “some gaps are harder to bridge than others” (p. 64) which further suggests that Sense-Making is not as neat and tidy as the Sense-Making metaphor makes it out to be. In the end, Sense-Making through the gaps of life is messy and complicated.

While many of the information needs that were articulated by interview participants can be understood as arising from their thrownness, *duhkha* or gap, some of the motivations that interview participants mentioned such as those that were concerned with personal or spiritual development or were engaging in information behaviours for the benefit of others are not as easily articulated as a question. However, these motivations do suggest a “lack” on the part of the interview participants. For example, Josh noted above that he is practicing Dharma (engaging in spiritual information practices) because “it improves the quality of my life...I would like to be a kinder person.” He feels that his life is lacking the qualities of kindness from his own side. There is still a need for growth and improvement. These motivations do not necessarily involve inquiry and interrogation of

*Being* as much as the other motivations do. However, Batchelor would suggest that these motivations are related to Being in the end. He suggests that the state of Buddhahood, of being an enlightened being is an optimal way of Being wherein the qualities and abilities of self-knowledge and compassion have fully transformed an individual.

### 5.5.3 Life is suffering II: Fallenness, delusion, and power

The next dimension of care which Heidegger declares as another problematic aspect of Dasein's existential constitution is fallenness. Dahlstrom (2013) describes fallenness as "Dasein's everyday propensity to become absorbed into the world into which it has been thrown, i.e. the world of its concerns, and to lose itself in the They, the public ways of being" (p. 72). These "public ways of Being" are a result of enculturation in a world with others. These would include conformity to culturally held beliefs and worldviews, adherence to social norms and expectations, and the respecting of linguistic conventions (these aspects together Heidegger calls *das Man*, the 'They' or the 'One'). Pedersen (2018) supplies, "Heidegger uses this strange formulation to get at the idea that our beliefs about ourselves and the world are picked up from the social milieu, having no definite author or source. We merely go by 'what they are saying'" (p. 59).

However, Heidegger explains that fallenness is more problematic than mere enculturation because it ultimately describes a state where Dasein has "fallen away from itself as an authentic potentiality for Being its Self" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 220). In being lost in the everyday distractions of the They, Dasein becomes ignorant of the more fundamental truths about Being. Wheeler (2011) explains that "fallen-ness involves a closing off or covering up of the world (more precisely, of any real understanding of the world) through a fascination with it" (s. 2.2.7, para. 4). Dasein is distracted by the froth of culture instead of taking responsibility for its own Being and its full potential. Subsequently, Dasein comes to live in an inauthentic (*uneigentlich*) mode of existence (more on this later). However, Dasein has a choice. Dasein can continue to live inauthentically, or it can engage in actions which allow it to develop a real understanding of the world in the face of death--to live authentically.

In terms of spiritual information practices, the concept of fallenness is helpful in two primary ways. The first way is that it provides further explanation for some of the



motivations interview participants mentioned for engaging in spiritual information practices. More specifically, like thrownness, the recognition of the state of fallenness by an individual is an impetus to respond to or to ‘correct’ a befallen state. Relatedly, fallenness is also helpful because it provides a framework to understand the ways in which the interview participants recognize and respond to their inauthentic mode of existence. The characteristics of fallenness like ignorance, closed off-ness, and distraction manifest as barriers or as a type of power (per Devin) that constrains the engagement of information practices leading to spiritual outcomes. In other words, the concept of fallenness allows for an examination of the tensions between the authentic and inauthentic mental states and practices which are at odds with each other as Buddhists progress along the spiritual path. Again, both Buddhism and Dervin’s Sense-Making will provide useful elaborations to the concept of fallenness in the context of Buddhist information practices while also contributing to the ongoing critique of Dervin’s Sense-Making.

There are parallels to fallenness within the Buddhist tradition. In particular, Buddhism offers an explanation for the state of fallenness itself as well as for the ongoing mental obstacles that interview participants mentioned. Both are attributable to *delusions*. Delusions are defined as mental factors (parts of the mind) that arise from inappropriate attention and function to make the mind unpeaceful and uncontrolled (Gyatso, 2014, p. 98). The characteristic of “inappropriate attention” refers to how the mind engages with objects and exaggerates their apparent qualities (Gyatso, 2014, p. 106) thus concealing the way that the object actually appears. For instance, the delusion of attachment exaggerates the good qualities of an object and contributes to the wrong view that that object is a permanent and unceasing cause of happiness. The attention or focus of inappropriate attention is “inappropriate” because it is un conducive to the attainment of enlightenment. Indulging in the appropriate attention and subsequent delusions only serves to further entrench the masking of the true nature of the object and the mind’s relationship with it as well as developing further familiarity with deluded ways of viewing the world. This inappropriate familiarity is likened to the uncontrolled fascination with public ways of Being.



Within the Buddhist tradition, delusions are to blame for all suffering and the attainment of enlightenment involves removing all delusions from the mind. In the *lōrig* teachings, delusions are classified at various levels of severity (as an aid to understanding, recognizing and abandoning them) but all ultimately derive from a single pervasive delusion: self-grasping ignorance. Self-grasping ignorance is a delusion that views all objects as mind-independent, existing from their own side, or by their own power. Self-grasping ignorance is an exaggeration of the way *every object of existence* appears. Gyatso (2014) explains, “Whenever ordinary beings see an object they naturally apprehend it as being inherently existent. This grasping mind is itself an exaggeration” (p. 106). More importantly, in addition to the objects appearing in the world, a human individual’s body, mind, and “I” also appear as inherently existent to themselves. This deluded perception of inherent existence negatively influences the way human beings perceive and conceive themselves to exist in the world by obscuring the way their bodies, minds, and “I”s actually exist. Believing in the inherent existence of objects, human beings instead relate with, and engage with the world as it falsely exists (i.e., as viewing these inherently existing objects as sources of happiness and suffering or as permanent and unchanging). Self-grasping ignorance is insidious because beings often are unaware that they are perceiving the world incorrectly and thus are unaware of how they are caught up in a world of illusions. While self-grasping ignorance is functioning in the mind of individuals, it masks or obscures any real understanding of who they are, similarly as to how the public ways of being function to obfuscate Dasein’s understanding of its own Being. The delusion of self-grasping ignorance as well as all other delusions will continue to function in the mind until they are reduced and then finally abandoned, but this takes great effort. Otherwise, self-grasping ignorance and other delusions will continue to manifest in the minds of sentient beings without choice. Thus, fallenness can be described in a Buddhist fashion as the assenting to, then relating to, illusory or deluded phenomena which prevents an understanding of one’s true nature.

Dervin’s contribution to the explanation of fallenness derives from her discussion on the role of *power* within her Sense-Making model. One of the fundamental assumptions of Dervin’s Sense-Making methodology is how “issues of force and power pervade the human condition” (Foreman-Wernet, 2003, p. 8). More specifically, Dervin’s model is interested in helping to explain how power, however it is construed, plays a role in

propelling and constraining Sense-Making. Fallenness can also be regarded as a state wherein power is influential in determining Dasein's Being-in-the-world. Public ways of Being essentially demonstrate the power of others, as a collective, to shape the interpretations and actions of Dasein into an inauthentic mode of existence. These public interpretations function uncontrollably in the minds of living beings. Speaking metaphorically, they *impose* themselves upon living beings. Dervin notes that it is not only external forms of power that propel and constrain Sense-Making (e.g. laws, institutions, norms) with external barriers being the way in which scholars have typically framed barriers to information seeking. Internal forms of power are also offered. Dervin and Frenette (2003/2001) write:

Sense-Making involves energy, both propelling and constraining. Every moment of Sense-Making involves energy-force, power, and constraint. These energies come from within (e.g., motivation, resistance) and without (e.g., barriers, help from society, others, institutions), and from unique circumstances and enduring social conditions. (p. 240)

It is the understanding of our knowledge and conceptualization of these internal barriers that the concepts of fallenness and delusions from the Buddhist tradition best offer.

Now that the concept of fallenness (with its elaborations from Buddhism and Dervin) have been offered, statements from interview participants will further the discussion by providing some empirical evidence to support these ideas, or by providing a basis for a critique of Dervin's Sense-Making. First, there is a return to the notion that fallenness can be used to provide further explanation for some of the motivations interview participants mentioned for engaging in spiritual information practices.

Fallenness can act as a reactive motivation when one's fallenness has been identified or experienced and there is a subsequent movement away from the fallen state to a state that is more deeply or more correctly associated with Being, which Heidegger identifies as an authentic (*eigentlich*)<sup>18</sup> mode of existence. Fallenness, in the case of the interview

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<sup>18</sup> "the word might be more literally translated as 'ownedness', or 'being owned', or even 'being one's own', implying the idea of owning up to and owning what one is and does" (Wheeler, 2011, s. 3.1, para. 3)

participants, is made evident to the participants through having some previous exposure to, or practice of, Buddhist teachings. More specifically, interview participants such as Josh utilize Buddhism's understanding of reality and subsequent diagnosis of the problem of suffering to recognize his fallenness. Josh says:

I have these wonderful books to help me out with the situation. Of course, I don't just want to cope with reality, I want to get out of this reality. That's the ultimate goal. I don't know if I'm going to get it this life, but I will try.

Josh recognizes that his everyday conception of reality is at fault for his suffering. He is blaming his delusions for this problem. This everyday conception based on a deluded view functions to obscure a state of non-suffering, a true understanding of self, per the Buddhist tradition. Josh uses his knowledge of his fallen state as a motivation to begin to move out of that state. If Josh was going to attempt to remain in his fallen state and proceed to live inauthentically, then he would instead be attempting to cope with reality the way it is: to deal with reality within the confines of fallenness, being occupied with mundane solutions to the problems of old age, sickness, and death that are culturally or socially acceptable. More importantly, Josh mentions that it is the Dharma books--spiritual information--which can affect this change of reality. He is fighting against the power of societal expectations through employing an unconventional solution to the problem of suffering. This fallenness affects how he can successfully manage his existential gap, which he does through engaging in spiritual information practices. The latter part of his quote, "I don't know if I'm going to get it this life, but I will try," indicates that he is still struggling against this fallen state, despite the magnitude of the task.

Kyle's statement, which was earlier used for evidence of existentially-driven motivations for seeking spiritual information also provides an example of fallenness from the interview participants. Kyle said:

So, for me, engaging with the Dharma is about trying to find a way to respond appropriately to that existential truth, to not shirk that question, to actually find a meaning, find a way of living that is meaningful in light of those.

Kyle's statement indicates that he believes that a real understanding of Being is possible, that deeper levels of understanding do exist. The force of the questioning attitude

underlines his desire to pursue that understanding. It is important for Kyle to deny the illusions of the They (i.e. public ways of being, delusions) because ultimately, they have no *real* meaning. They are inauthentic, because they are characterized by a lack of understanding about Being, a lack of inner or self-knowledge about what it means to Be or how it is to Be. The real meaning is found at a deeper level through the pursuit of authentic modes of existence. These are characterized by having this inner understanding. Kyle also echoes Josh with his statement about the role of the Dharma in the pursuit of this deeper understanding. Engaging with the Dharma, that is, engaging in spiritual information practices, is a necessary part of this. Thus, it could be suggested that information and the process of informing is a solution to fallenness.

Next, an individual's fallenness can be used as a way to understand the obstacles, barriers and other forces that constrain or influence Kadampa practitioners in their practice of Dharma, and thus, in their engagement of spiritual information practices. Again, in these cases, fallenness is revealed because of the previous experience of the interview participants with the Dharma. The practitioners that were interviewed often seemed to be walking a middling path between authentic (spiritual) and inauthentic (public ways of Being) modes of existence. They alternated between their fallen and unfallen state depending upon whether they were engaged in spiritual information practices. The matter of putting effort into Dharma practice was a significant theme mentioned earlier. Despite the overwhelmingly positive outcomes that the interview participants mentioned in section 4.3, participants had complex feelings about their Dharma practice. They often struggled with mustering enough, or feeling like they were not mustering enough, effort to engage in practices as Kelly noted in her interview: "Effort is sometimes hard to conjure up." They often felt that whatever practices they were currently engaged in were "not enough" and this causes them to feel negatively about themselves and their practices. For example, Katrina mentions her guilt about this: "I always have the little bird with the guilt going 'you know, you should do this'". This lack of effort is evidence of a fallen state as the fallen state is characterized by being caught up in the everyday world. In the Buddhist tradition a lack of effort is a delusion. More specifically, it is the laziness of attachment. It is a type of deluded non-effort that is caused by the belief that objects of the ordinary world are a better source of happiness. From the Buddhist perspective, a lack of effort is fallen because it aligns with an unawareness of death that

is a characteristic part of the fallen state. Authentic modes of existence possess this awareness of death, as Wheeler (2011) explains: “When I take on board the possibility of my own not-Being, my own being-able-to-Be is brought into proper view. Hence my awareness of my own death as an omnipresent possibility discloses the authentic self (a self that is mine)” (s. 2.3.1, para. 4). To affect the reality-changing outcomes of the spiritual Sense-Making process, practitioners must be aware of how they are being constrained by their own delusions. Their delusions prevent or make it difficult for practitioners to engage in spiritual information practices. To this end, Madeline reiterates that she believes the Dharma to be the only way to counter “the delusions of our mind”. She speaks of the Dharma as a tool which is used in everyday life to counter the delusions that arise, in other words, to counter her fallen state.

This tension between authentic and inauthentic can also be gleaned from Gyatso’s (1995) *Joyful Path of Good Fortune*. Gyatso discusses the need to have correct motivations for engaging in Dharma practice. These motivations stand at odds against the ordinary or secular motivations for seeking information. Earlier, Gyatso (1995) warned that if a practitioner read Dharma instructions with an incorrect motivation for doing so, then they would not receive the full benefits or results from their practice (p. 316). Incorrect motivations are deluded motivations, and thus they function to close off the development of a true understanding of Being which an authentic mode of existence requires. Similarly, Gyatso also mentions the need to have as little distraction as possible while practicing Dharma in order to quickly gain familiarity with an experience of the teachings. Distraction is a characteristic of fallenness, as when Dasein is absorbed in public ways of Being, so when there is less distraction, “our mind becomes clear and still and we can observe our object of meditation clearly” (Gyatso, 1995, p. 371). When the mind is not distracted, the deep understanding required for correcting fallenness can be more efficiently developed. As the interviewed practitioners are still on the path to enlightenment that means that they must alternate between states of incorrect and correct motivation and distraction and non-distraction while they make progress along the spiritual path. Thus, they must alternate between the fallen and unfallen states.

The Buddho-Heideggerian contributions to Sense-Making reveal aspects of Dervin's thinking on Sense-Making where more thought and research is needed. The spiritual context or view disrupts the model slightly.

First, the study of obstacles and barriers through the lens of fallenness reveals that there is less clarity between the idea of gaps and barriers in Dervin's model and in her writing. Gaps are defined by Dervin as when movement forward through time and space has stopped and subsequently sense must be made to keep movement going forward. Barriers and obstacles, understood as the constraining aspects of power, also have a stopping or slowing function upon movement forward and thus have a similar definition to gaps. As was evidenced by the interview participants, their barriers often required a Sense-Making process, the authentic development of understanding about their Being (i.e., recognizing their fallen state as a gap and bridging it by engaging in spiritual information practices), to remove themselves temporarily from their state of fallenness.

Additionally, Dervin's Sense-Making relies too heavily upon rational, thought-out choices by the Sense-maker when the Sense-maker is attempting to bridge a gap. Close collaborator of Dervin, Foreman-Wernet, writes, "Sense-Making assumes that no human movement, either individual or collective, can be fully instructed or determined a priori. Even if the next step (the next moment) is in conformity, it is a step made anew by the individual" (Foreman-Wernet, 2003, p. 8). Her statement of a "step made anew by the individual" endows the human Sense-maker with a great deal of agency in controlling how they move through the Sense-Making model. She implies that individuals are, at least in part, required to make a conscious, rational choice to verb their way across the gap that they encounter. While this is not completely problematic (as there are indeed many occasions when this happens), when Sense-Making is considered in the realm of fallenness' public ways of Being, Heidegger would suggest that there is far more unconscious sense-making that is occurring in everyday life. (Indeed, as the reader may recall from above, Heidegger postulates that *Dasein* is sense-making). Instead of making a conscious choice, human beings are bridging gaps in unexamined and unconscious ways. Pedersen (2018) supplies, "Not only are we thrown into a world without our choice, but also we are always already existing in a certain way before we can actively choose how we want to exist" (p. 62). Heidegger is suggesting that human beings

possess far less agency over their sense-making than Dervin implies. Again, this lack of choice is why fallenness is a component of the suffering lives of human beings. Human beings are enamored with public ways of Being without choice *as part of their existential constitution*. Correcting fallenness is necessary because it allows human beings to develop choice about how they want to be-in-the-world. Correcting fallenness is a rational, thought-out choice about how to make sense of the world by purposefully taking-objects-as in a spiritual manner instead of being swept away in the unconscious sense-making of the They. It is in this manner where Dervin's model *is* indeed useful.

#### 5.5.4 Bridging gaps to outcomes: A projection of possibilities

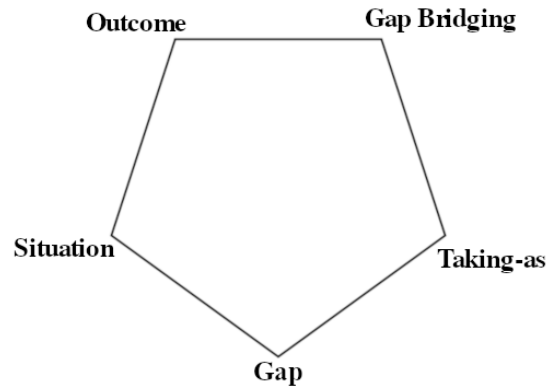
After explaining the human Sense-maker, the act of Sense-Making itself and gaps through a Buddho-Heideggerian lens, the next section will discuss the process of gap-bridging to outcomes, with these two components being the final two main aspects of Dervin's Sense-Making metatheory. Gap-bridging and outcomes are intimately linked, with gap-bridging being a direct, substantial cause of outcomes in Dervin's theory. Indeed, Dervin refers to outcomes as "consequences of Sense-Making" (e.g. 2003/1999b, pp. 142, 151). Dervin offers that gaps are bridged in a variety of ways which she collectively calls *verbings* (so-called because the method of bridging gaps are described as verbs in the gerund form). She (2003/1991a) writes:

In gap bridging the communicating entity (individual or collective) engages in behavior: observings, thinkings, idea creatings, comparings, contrasting, rejectings, talkings, sendings, agreeings, disagreeings, and so on. These behaviors are the material of the gap bridging. Many of these behaviors are necessarily repetitions. (p. 64)

With this statement, Dervin again reveals a flaw or oversight in her conceptualization about gap-bridging. Earlier, it was suggested that the act of *taking-as* was the essence of the Sense-Making process as Dervin notes that the way that people bridge gaps is by *interpreting* their way across them. This is in contrast to the quotation above in which she notes that behaviours, *verbings*, are the essence of gap-bridging. The three-step triangle that Dervin uses to demonstrate the fundamental components of her metatheory (Situation, Gap, Outcome), as a result, is either unclear (by collapsing too many stages of the theory into each other) or incomplete (through a missing component). A model is needed that captures both the taking-as interpretive component of gap-bridging as well as



the behaviours, practices and verbings that are also constitutive of gap-bridging. Five components, instead of three, emerge as the core components of Sense-Making when the Heideggerian and Buddhist insights are included: Situation, Gap, Taking-as, Bridging, and Outcome. The model is represented visually below. The model is read counter-clockwise beginning at Situation.



**Figure 1: Five-point Sense-Making Model**

This new model can be summarized as follows. Situation in this new model is understood generally as Dasein as Being-in-the-world, as a human being always finding itself in the world. Dasein encounters or becomes aware of gaps (particularly in the case of Buddhists, existential or spiritual ones such as thrownness and fallenness) and subsequently, movement forward through time and space is stopped. Dasein must bridge this gap to continue movement forward. If Dasein views the gap as something that necessitates a response, then she begins to bridge the gap by directing the process of taking-as. If one recalls, the essence of taking-as is taking an entity (an object) or being for the purpose of something. Heidegger famously uses a hammer to provide an example of the way Dasein pre-conceptually knows that the hammer is for hammering. The hammer pre-conceptually makes sense for Dasein as a tool. Expanding beyond single objects, everything in Dasein's world is pre-conceptually taken-as an entity. Dasein interprets every single object that it encounters for the purpose of something. In this way Dasein moves through the world successfully interacting with it. Collectively, Heidegger



calls this web of interpretations a “totality of involvements” (Wheeler, 2011). In a spiritual context, Dasein takes-entities-for the purposes of spiritual development, to be used for the purposes of spirituality, as a response to the gap that they encounter. Directing or choosing to take-entities-as in a spiritual way allows for Dasein to engage in practices, behaviours or verbings that either adequately bridge the gap or assist in an ongoing construction of bridges across larger gaps. The outcome in either case can be, amongst others, some of the outcomes that interview participants mentioned in section 4.4 such as positive moods, increased metacognitive skills, and changes in worldviews. Furthermore, while Dasein is faced with longer gaps (such as existential ones which an individual might grapple with across their whole lifetime) the components of taking-as and verbings have a reciprocal relationship. Taking-as for the purposes of spirituality to overcome existential gaps may lead to the information practices that are outlined above such as reading, listening, contemplating and meditating on spiritual information. The outcomes of such bridgings are the creation of a “new and improved” situation that leads to further taking-as in a spiritual manner which further leads to gap-bridging verbings such as contemplating and mediating, creating a virtuous cycle of improvement and transformation.

Particularly important here is the directed nature of the gap-bridging by spiritual practitioners. There is effort taken by the interview participants to direct the way they are interpreting the world. For example, Michelle says she is “working hard to think differently”, Kyle says he is “trying to find a way to respond appropriately” while Nathan says he is “trying to find, to figure out, new sources of satisfaction”. These statements imply that the way they were taking-as previously was not as successful in helping them be suffering-free. Instead, the interview participants are definitely attempting to direct their taking-as in a spiritual, that is, in an authentic manner. Dervin would agree here as she writes that gap-bridging depends upon an “[a]ctor-defined purpose” (Dervin, 2003/1989b, p. 54), conceptually bestowing a great deal of power and ability to the Sense-maker for determining their own reality. This is not to say that taking-as only functions within the context of spiritual information practices. In the case of non-spiritual taking-as, one could respond to existential gaps by unconsciously engaging in taking-as and verbing in ways that are consistent with thrown and fallen states that are defined by public ways of Being.

This directed taking-as is very related to the last dimension of care, projection. It is helpful in understanding the ways in which Dasein is not completely limited by thrownness and fallenness. The discussion until now has painted Dasein in a bleak position: a being imprisoned by its own human condition and who is ignorantly pursuing an inauthentic life trapped by the allurements of public ways of being. The third dimension of care, projection, allows for some optimism. There is optimism because while Dasein must deal with the gaps and constraints of its thrownness and fallenness, Dasein is also free to make choices from a great variety of possibilities. Wheeler (2011) explains that projection is part of Dasein's existential constitution because "at each moment of its life, Dasein is Being-ahead-of-itself, oriented towards the realm of its possibilities, and is thus incomplete" (s. 2.3.1, para. 2). Brady (2017) complements, "Dasein chooses what it will be, and this is its essence. Or, more accurately, it *is* its possibilities, which open it up onto the future, *and* its activity of choosing, and doing, one or the other as ways of being" (s. 1.1b, para. 4, emphasis in original). In relation to the process of gap-bridging, Dasein has a choice on how to bridge gaps because projection is part of Dasein's existential constitution. In other words, Dasein has a choice on how to take-as. Projection allows for the directed nature of the spiritual taking-as process.

The Buddhist contribution to this discussion and explanation of gap-bridging is that it describes a grand potential<sup>19</sup> and possibility for Dasein. It offers that Buddhahood is the highest potential for Dasein, the "optimum mode of being" (Batchelor, 1983). Buddhahood is a state wherein "inauthentic modes of being have been purified and the potentials for authentic modes of being have been fulfilled" (Batchelor, 1983, p. 115). These possibilities are possible, according to Buddhist philosophy because sentient beings lack inherent existence, they have no permanent essence, no abiding self so there is no absolute necessity to assert that Dasein exists in a preconceived way. Possibilities also rely upon the mind-dependent existence of reality, so Dasein is not inherently and permanently human and allows for the transcendence of the human condition through

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<sup>19</sup> This is by no means meant to imply that other religious paths are not equally "grand potentials" for Dasein. At this time, it is outside the scope of this project to compare the soteriological goals of other religious paths for their inclusion in this framework. Part of the statement here also relies upon Batchelor's framing of Buddhism within Heideggerian terminology.

following a spiritual path (i.e., engaging in spiritual information practices) and transforming the mind (i.e., attaining realization-like information). Buddhism calls this potentiality of every sentient being's mind to become an enlightened being *buddha nature* or *buddha seed* (Gyatso, 2005). It is important to note that this transcendence is not intended to be “magical” or “supernatural” but rather a matter of cause and effect. To attain the outcome of enlightenment, of Buddhahood, a practitioner simply needs to engage in the mental and physical actions that are the causes of enlightenment.

The discussion of prerequisite minds for engaging in spiritual information practices again is important here. The mind of faith is the first step to actualizing possibilities in an authentic manner. Faith (i.e., confidence, trust, belief) in the possibility of transformation through engaging in spiritual information practices is required before the practitioner would devote time to engaging in such practices. Virtuous minds like faith prime the mind as a whole (recognizing that minds have multiple parts, and virtuous minds are merely a functioning part of that). They function in a directed way to ‘colour’ the taking-as process in a spiritual manner. A statement from interview participant Amanda provides evidence for this. She says, “If I don’t believe I can actualize, then I have to say that I don’t believe in Dharma. I have to believe that to give me everything I need to move towards that”. The belief in actualization (that is, achieving the goals of spiritual practice) allows for her whole world to become a resource for her spiritual training since she interprets her experience in a directed way for that purpose.

The last aspect of Dervin’s metatheory to be discussed here is outcomes. A defining feature of a large majority of the outcomes reported by the interview participants was that they resulted in experiences of a new state of Being or in the establishment of a “new normal”. Dervin defines outcomes as being a result of gap-bridging. She (2003/1989a) offers that “questions answered, ideas gained, resources obtained” (p. 224) and “helps, hindrances, functions, dysfunctions, consequences, impacts, effects” (Dervin & Frenette, 2003/2001, p. 238) as examples of outcomes. The outcomes mentioned by interview participants of positive changes in mood, increased metacognitive skills and changes in worldview can certainly be understood as logical outcomes of the Sense-Making process. As was suggested at the end of section 5.4., the Sense-Making process is one of *world-creation*. Outcomes of spiritual information practices are merely stages on a path to

progressive, incremental changes to the worldview and abilities of the Sense-maker, Dasein. Outcomes lead to the establishment of a new world for Dasein, a new situation through which the Sense-maker continues to fulfill the human mandate of progressing forward through time and space. This incremental changing of the world is the very nature of continuum-like information. It is the slow edification of a spiritually transformed individual. Kyle explains his experience with the new world he has created through his spiritual practice:

It has, because it re-organizes your points of reference as to what's meaningful. So, for a long time I felt very conflicted that to be immersed in Dharma and have Dharma at the forefront of my life that I was kind of missing out on different parts of life that were very important. But now I don't feel that conflict. I feel that what I'm doing is the right thing for the rest of my life. I hope that stays.

First, he notes how there has been a change in his ability to take-as in a spiritual way and how this ability has become more entrenched in his life, effectively creating a new situation, a new world. His new world is characterized by a focus on authenticity since he mentions that his new situation is more focused on what is meaningful. His language, "I hope that stays," implies that this change has already happened (and is hopeful that it continues).

Travis' new normal, on the other hand, is more related to changes he has experienced to his mood. He notes:

It's made a tremendous start to the day with a calm mind, a degree of self-discipline instigated by a plan. Once that base is built, once I have that first step on the path, then the other one becomes much more evident, much more attainable.

His new world is one that is characterized by calmness. Like Dervin's situations, he views this as a base for future growth and change. The language of attainment that he uses suggests that this is starting point for further projecting into possibilities.

To this point, mapping Dervin's Sense-Making to Heidegger's dimensions of care, with insights from Buddhism and experiences from the interview participants have outlined the basic way in how information needs, seeking, and use function within the Buddhist context. Beyond the Buddhist context and into a more secular arena, individuals can also

take-as in non-spiritual way, but this is not really any different from normal, everyday Sense-Making that Dervin has previously studied. The use of the concept of taking-as in this dissertation was to reveal the hermeneutic nature of the Sense-Making process that was partially hidden. According to Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics, individuals are constantly interpreting the objects in their reality for the purpose of something; objects do not exist without human beings relating to them in some way. It is the directed taking-as in a spiritual manner that is unique to (Kadampa) Buddhist practice. However, directed taking-as can also have ordinary applications as well. The point of directed taking-as is to change Dasein, or the worldview of Dasein, so it can be used whenever an individual wants to achieve this, perhaps as a part of cognitive behavioural therapy or the overcoming of depression, grief, and addiction where one is attempting to change the way they are relating to the objects that appear to them.

The next section builds upon the foundation established by Heidegger's dimensions of care by examining authenticity (which was introduced in section 5.5.3 on fallenness) in a closer manner while the last section will offer a final continuation of this section on outcomes, however with Buddhist philosophy being the driving force behind the explanation.

## 5.6 Towards Authenticity: Spiritual information as instructions for authentic Being

In the earlier sections concerning Dasein's fallenness, the concepts of authenticity and inauthenticity were briefly introduced as inauthenticity is a characteristic of Dasein's fallenness. In this section, the concept of authenticity is taken up again and explored further. Given the optimism provided by Dasein's projective characteristics, Dasein has the choice to live an authentic life rather than one that is fallen, which is indeed what many of the interview participants mentioned that they have decided to pursue in earlier sections. Again, through triangulating Sense-Making, Heideggerian and Buddhist thought, this section discusses the ability of spiritual information, and the engagement of spiritual information practices, to allow Dasein to move towards a state of authenticity. More specifically, it postulates that the attainment of authenticity is the final bridging of an existential gap. From the Buddhist perspective, the attainment of authenticity resolves

not only fallenness, but thrownness as well. Finally, this section also discusses implications of authenticity and its attainment for Dervin's Sense-Making theory.

Heidegger defines a truly authentic existence as one where Dasein "has come to grips with [its] own deepest possibility of being" (Harman, 2007, p. 60). Authentic existence is tied to projection, as Dahlstrom (2013) explains: "while not responsible for being here, [Dasein] is singularly responsible for choosing certain possibilities over others" (p. 28). This means that while Dasein finds itself in a state of thrownness and fallenness, ultimately it is personally responsible for its own Being. It is responsible for directing and making choices about how it wants to be. The simple definition of authenticity provided by Heidegger suggests a "final" state of authenticity (as evidenced by the use of the past perfect tense, "has come to grips") but the language of both Dahlstrom above and Pedersen below when discussing authentic existence suggests that accomplishing an authentic existence is a *process* occurring over time. Pedersen (2018) writes, "Authentic existence for Heidegger has to do with making one's existence one's own" (p. 57). The language that they use in their definition of authenticity suggests an active pursuit of it. This parallels with the idea in Buddhism and what was previously discussed with Dervin's Sense-Making, that there is first edification and transformation of an individual before a completed state is realized.

An understanding of authenticity is incomplete without also understanding its opposite, inauthenticity. Harman (2007) defines the state of inauthenticity as when Dasein derives its "self-understanding from what the public says" (p. 60) instead of truly understanding one's own Being (the state of authenticity). The state of fallenness is characterized by this inauthenticity, and like fallenness, inauthenticity is marked by a state of *unknowing*. Pedersen (2018) writes, "The main problem Heidegger has with inauthentic existence is that it keeps us from grasping the true nature of our existence" (p. 57). Inauthenticity, like fallenness, is functioning to obscure and misrepresent reality, hence why it was classified as a type of existential gap in section 5.5.3 which Dasein must cross. Pedersen (2018) also writes, "When existing authentically we come to have a clear grasp of the fundamental structure of human existence" (p. 58). This further suggests that the movement (in full or in part) from inauthenticity to authenticity is one where an understanding about the fundamental structure of human existence has

occurred. The question that then follows is how exactly does one develop an understanding about the fundamental structure of human existence?

The Buddhist response to this question would be that the Dharma provides the information (the Dharma, the teachings themselves) as well as information-use techniques (information practices such as listening, reading, contemplating and meditating) for this understanding about the fundamental structure of existence to occur over time. Batchelor (1983) notes that the Dharma has informative value. He writes that “The primary purpose of Dharma is to reestablish a consciousness of being” (p. 25), which indicates that its purpose is for developing knowledge and knowing. In the Buddhist tradition, then, the movement from inauthenticity to authenticity requires information. The movement from inauthenticity to authenticity can also be understood within the framework of Dervin’s Sense-Making as Dervin explicitly involves information as a primary agentive factor necessary for gap-bridging. Dervin (2003/1989b) writes: “When this gap is articulated as a question, ‘information’ or ‘messages’ serve as fodder for constructing the answer” (p. 54). By this, information has a utilitarian function, it serves as a tool in everyday life to bridge the gaps encountered by the human individual such as those mentioned by the interview participants. Many of the interview participants, when asked about whether the Dharma was information according to them, opted to respond that they thought that the Dharma was best described as a tool:

The teachings are the only tools that I think are available to society to break the delusions of our mind. (Madeline)

I began going to a Dharma centre I thought it was merely a philosophy. Now it’s like a religion for me. Information, it seems boring. [Dharma] is not boring! I don’t want it to be information. Well, it’s information about daily life. It’s useful. It’s like tools. I prefer to match it with tools than information. (Michelle)

[W]hen I have a regular practice that I can bring myself out of it, or if I get frustrated with people, my daily practice helps me remember to have patience, and to remember to breathe. It’s like a tool kit that I can go to in situations. (Rachel)

I think it answers a lot of questions, or at least gives me tools, instructions on how to answer some questions and move forward. (Lindsay)

Indeed, even Gyatso describes the spiritual path as a tool in *Joyful Path of Good Fortune* wherein one engages with spiritual information. He writes, "a path functions as an



antidote...it is like a tool that eliminates all the mental faults and defilements that cause our problems” (1995, p. 201). The Dharma provides the basis for practitioners to take-as in a spiritual manner by explicitly explaining how to use the mind to conceive, understand, and interpret reality differently in both formal and informal (i.e., everyday) settings. Instead of the “natural” fallen ways of taking-as, the Dharma provides a conception about how reality should appear if one was free from delusions and misunderstandings. Correct instructions are essential, explains Gyatso (1995), because “The reason why we continue to follow samsaric paths is that because of our ignorance we do not know the nature of objects clearly and perfectly” (p. 319). In the Buddhist tradition, practitioners have to rely upon the information provided by their Spiritual Guide who is viewed as an authority about how objects actually exist and must subsequently try to relate to those objects in the correct way until they can perceive and understand the truth directly themselves. This is especially true of the fundamental structure of Being as included in Dharma instructions are instructions on how to understand the true nature of one’s Being. In other words, the Dharma is instructions on how to live authentically and to finally achieve a state of permanent authenticity, having used the information-like information of Dharma to transform it into realization-like information through the iterative continuum-like information.

Authentic information functions the way it does because it is commensurate to an existential level of questioning and also because it eventually ceases to be information-like information. Gyatso (1995) notes “it is one thing to know that something is true on the level of information and it is quite another thing to have personal experience of its truth” (p. 93). This is the crux of Buddhist practice. Dharma must be transformed into realization-like information for it to function as an antidote to suffering. Merely accumulating more information-like information will not lead to a transformation of Dasein. Batchelor (1983) explains:

Our very being becomes a question for us. The explicit formulation of this question in such forms as, “What is the purpose of existence?” or “What is the meaning of life?” is a subsequent articulation referring to a pre-articulate state of being. As with all articulate sounds these forms of the question are necessarily referential. Indeed, how could any questions cause us existential concern without first becoming aware of them within the constitution of existence itself? The danger here is that we tend to identify the ontological question with its conceptual



reflection and then set about to seek the answer in similar conceptual terms. This is an unrealistic pursuit. The explicit question, “What is the meaning of life?” will never be satisfactorily answered by another sentence, “The meaning of life is x, y, z.” Judged as an articulate question it can be said to have little or no significance. It is only when the question ceases to be identified with the subject-verb-predicate structure of grammar, and is recognized within its original ground, within existence itself, that we can start looking for an answer. But such an answer will not be restricted to the confinements of language; it too must be revealed within an existential structure. Moreover, to be fully meaningful it must correlate directly with the structure of the question. And since the question—the life of man—is human in structure, likewise the answer too must be revealed in a human structure. (p. 67)

The purpose of spiritual information practices is to change Dasein’s Being-in-the-world. The problems of existence as Heidegger (and Buddha) explained, thrownness and fallenness, are problems or flaws of human existence. Therefore, they are problems that *can only be resolved in existence itself*. This ultimately means that the nature of authenticity and of realization-like information is to describe a state wherein Dasein has *become information*. Joanne, one of the interview participants, had been practicing Buddhism for thirteen years at the time of the interview, noted that this is exactly what she trying to do with her practice. She said:

You have to have the intellectual understanding but then you have just do it. Be it. Be it. And that’s where I think I’m going to...that’s very interesting. I’m going from just studying it and reading it to doing it and being it. I think that’s the stage I’m at: being the Dharma.

Her statement suggests that she has already succeeded in the information practices of reading, listening and memorizing Dharma and is moving forward from there. Being the Dharma is the next step, taking it beyond the documents that contain the words of Dharma. In earlier sections, interview participants also mentioned that they were ultimately seeking an experience rather than information-like information itself. This aligns with this idea of becoming the Dharma as well, as experience and Being are similar if not identical things.

This idea of “becoming information” is not outside of the realm of possibility in Dervin’s Sense-Making, either. Dervin notes that the gap-bridging process, indeed the Sense-Making process as a whole, is one of construction in which information plays a central role. It is especially possible to postulate this if one adopts the Buddhist conception of

the human individual as being one that lacks a permanent essence as the construction is not about adapting a “permanent” person, but rather about viewing Sense-Making and its effects as a series of causes and effects that results in a state of being “sense-made”. She writes:

Information in this formulation becomes that which informs. That which informs is that which bridges gaps. That which bridges gaps is necessarily that behaving, that constructing, that Sense-Making that built the bridge. (Dervin, 2003/1991b, p. 300)

Naturally, after a process of construction comes a completed construction, so one can extrapolate that continuing to make-sense using instructions for authenticity will eventually lead to that state.

The concept of authenticity and the idea that human individuals become information poses new challenges for information behaviour and practices research. Two concerns are posed and discussed here. First, the question of the nature of the self and its relationship to information, and second, the question of the ability to make value judgements about the information with which sense is made.

Often, in LIS research when information is defined, scholars use language that offers evidence of how the self or “I” is being conceived. In an unreflective way, scholars have often relied upon unconscious or naïve conceptions of human individuals, often conceiving the self as existing independently from body and mind and as an entity that controls the body and mind. For example, Bates (2006) writes:

We know that we are continually subjected to a huge range of sensory inputs and internal experiences of sensations and thoughts. In fact, almost anything existing in the universe, that can come into human and other animals’ purview, can be experienced as information. (p. 1033)

Bates’ language suggests that sensations, experiences and thoughts are phenomena that happen “to us”. Perhaps non-complicitly, she implies that there is an entity, a person, that is existing separately from these phenomena that is the “experiencer” of these phenomena rather than imputing the human individual as a collection of these subjective phenomena.

The notion of “becoming information” as well as the process-like nature of the information practices of contemplation and meditation puts a hole in this conception of the self as an independently-existing phenomenon. The boundaries between what is self and what is information becomes blurry. It is unclear at what point either phenomena truly begin or end. Perhaps scholars rely on these conventions of self because of their cultural or scholarly contexts and also because it is simpler to do so, to have information and person as two neatly defined boxes. But hopefully as the arguments in this dissertation have demonstrated, in order to advance information behaviour research, there needs to be greater understanding of the human individual in general rather than a research focus purely on gathering findings about the characteristics of information. Information behaviour research has come to a sort of plateau. There is increasing horizontal growth in research as continually more populations’ information behaviours are studied, with new studies of “the information-seeking behaviour of ...”. Perhaps this has come as a sacrifice to vertical growth in the field of information behaviour. Is there truly growth in understanding the relationship between information, the individual, and reality? Has this quantitative growth in the number of studies permitted a qualitative deepening of understanding? Future advancements of information behaviour research might come from philosophical engagement with the nature of the self, reality and information at a more profound level. The perennial problems of the definitions of information need, use, and action may be improved with a philosophical lens. Concurring, Savolainen (2009) writes: “Information scientists have not been primarily interested in the fundamental questions concerning the conditions that make knowledge and knowing possible. Instead, they have focused on more specific issues dealing with information use” (p. 3). This is not to say, however, that these findings are useless or a waste of time as they obviously have value in enhancing the service provision or work of the populations that are studied.

The second issue that authenticity and “becoming information” present relates to Dervin’s conception of her Sense-Making metatheory as being a theory “between the cracks” which attempts to balance or straddle a range of contrasting approaches. As has previously been mentioned, Sense-Making is notably concerned with the *hows* of Sense-Making rather than the *whats* of Sense-Making. Dervin is not ultimately concerned with what sense is made, but rather in the process of it being made. The concept of

authenticity, and subsequently authentic information and information practices, introduces a value judgement upon this state and its related information and disrupts Dervin's delicate balance. Implicit in the concept of authenticity is that it is superior to inauthenticity, and so Sense-Making that utilizes authentic information, or that attempts to move from a state of inauthenticity would also necessarily be superior. This is not meant to be a moment of proselytization, but rather a genuine question about whether individuals should be left to make-sense knowing that it will ultimately cause them suffering. Even outside of the realm of spiritual information, to what extent should individuals be allowed to misinterpret the gaps they may actually be in? Is there a moral duty to intervene in people's faulty Sense-Making?

Furthermore, evidence from the interviews suggests that some ways of making sense are more efficacious or beneficial to individuals. Some of the interview participants reported that other worldviews and spiritual information that were previously provided to them were unsatisfactory in allowing them to keep moving forward according to the human mandate. They failed to properly bridge the gap that they were experiencing. Their language of "just didn't ring true with me", "It didn't make sense to me," and "it never really seemed right to me" suggests a sincerely attempted, but ultimately uncompleted gap-bridging. How should scholars account for such types of information that function in a superior manner than others, especially in a spiritual context? An analogy can be made to scientific knowledge which has consistently proven itself to be efficacious over pseudoscience in bridging gaps where that information is required, but the spiritual nature of the information in this case potentially invites controversy because the final question ends up being if one spiritual tradition's teachings are "better" than another's.

While authenticity may seem decidedly unsecular as it is presented here, it does not have to be so. Its definition, where an individual has come to grips with its "own deepest possibility of being" (Harman, 2007, p. 60), invites contemplation on what other types of information may be found to be authentic or leading to a state of authenticity. Perhaps they are the various "higher things in life" as Kari and Hartel (2007) have suggested.

## 5.7 Immanence and transcendence in spiritual information practices

This dissertation presents an inventory of the spiritual information practices of New Kadampa Buddhists, with an emphasis on the information practices that are performed in the everyday lives of Buddhist practitioners. It also attempts to connect together the various aspects of information behaviour (needs, uses, and outcomes) in a Buddhist context through the use of Dervin's Sense-Making methodology, a well-used everyday life information seeking model. Ultimately, it discussed how Buddhist spiritual information can be used to transform a human individual's Being-in-the-world. Spiritual contexts for everyday life information behaviours and practices are perhaps unique among other contexts in everyday life such as leisure because they question or defy their categorization as "everyday life". This last section of the dissertation takes up research question four: "Are spiritual information behaviours and practices best understood and conceptualized as part of everyday life information practices?" It examines whether the current everyday life paradigm is the best way to conceptualize studies like this one and whether the spiritual paradigm is unique enough to warrant a new category of study outside of the typical work, scholastic, and everyday life contexts. In essence, the question is whether spiritual information behaviours and practices can be considered immanent or transcendent. This section will contrast the immanent and transcendent characteristics of spiritual everyday life information practices taking into account the findings from this dissertation and will offer finally a potential solution to this problem.

Immanence refers to "the experience of the divine as within and among us" or "the experienced presence of the divine within the mundane world" (Larson, 2010). Immanence can be said to characterize spiritual information practices because it is merely the presence of the spiritual in everyday life. The information practices of reading, listening, meditating, and contemplating, the process of attaining authenticity in daily life, and the existential motivations deriving from Dasein's Being-in-the-world can all be understood within the context of the everyday. They eventually become "familiar, ordinary, and routine" (Savolainen, 2003) with the establishment of a regular Buddhist practice. It is these characteristics of "familiar, ordinary, routine" which Savolainen uses to define the everyday.

The concept of immanence is often paired with the concept of transcendence which originally meant “going beyond or outside one’s situation” or “moving from one mode of existence to another” (DuBose, 2010). Spiritual information practices can also be characterized by transcendence. The attainment of authenticity, from a Buddhist perspective is about attaining an optimum mode of Being (Batchelor, 1983) wherein Dasein permanently eradicates both its thrownness and its fallenness. Authenticity, in other words, is when Dasein overcomes the human condition and moves into another existence (in this case, as an enlightened being). In a simplistic sense, the attainment of enlightenment can be understood as becoming holy, mystical or divine. Information practices in the context of the Buddhist path can be considered transcendent because they have as their ultimate goal the transcendence of everyday life which is in the nature of suffering. This is why some interview participants, for example, found it difficult to conceptualize the Dharma as a type of immanent spiritual information despite the fact that they were using it in seemingly everyday ways. Clemens and Cushing (2010) suggest that transcendent information practices could be considered ‘beyond’ everyday life information practices as they are characterized by being deeply meaningful, unfamiliar, extraordinary or profoundly emotional (Clemens, 2017, p. 11). Because of the unique nature of ‘beyond’ everyday life information practices as compared to Savolainen’s “familiar, ordinary, routine” definition of everyday life information seeking practices, Clemens and Cushing suggests that ‘beyond’ everyday life information practices are a distinct sphere of study separate from the traditional work, scholastic and everyday life categories. They question whether ELIS is sufficient in addressing information behaviours that they characterize as ‘beyond’ everyday life.

This ‘beyond’ everyday life information seeking paradigm is made more compelling when one considers the consequences of how Savolainen originally conceptualizes ELIS in its debut paper (Savolainen, 1995). Pierre Bourdieu’s idea of *habitus* plays a foundational role in Savolainen’s ELIS theory. Savolainen (1995) supplies that habitus is understood as “a socially and culturally determined system of thinking, perception and evaluation internalized by the individual” (p. 261-262) and thus it “provide[s] a background for the conceptualization of information seeking as a natural component of everyday practices” (p. 261). However, the concept of habitus is reminiscent of Heidegger’s fallenness where human individuals live their lives ensnared by culturally

held beliefs and worldviews and adherence to social norms and expectations. Harman (2007) supplies, “Dasein does not see the world directly, because Dasein has a historical structure, and generally interprets things in the same way that others interpret them” (p. 59); therefore Dasein’s projective abilities within the realm of ELIS are limited to what is normal and acceptable by the They. In this case, Savolainen’s ELIS, by relying so heavily on the concept of habitus, places a proverbial ceiling on where Dasein is able to project itself. Savolainen’s ELIS is in the nature of fallenness, and thus provides an arena in which Dasein fails to take responsibility for its own Being and “[w]hen Dasein is absorbed in concern for the world, it is not authentically itself” (Harman, 2007, p. 67). As a corollary, the information seeking that a human individual does as part of mastery of life (i.e., coherence of the life project at large as Savolainen [1995] describes it) is inauthentic.

Despite these arguments against conceptualizing spiritual information practices as ELIS, spiritual information practices remain in the realm of the everyday simply because they are familiar, ordinary, and routine. They are, in a common-sense way, part of human beings’ everyday life. Everyday life, as Heidegger reminds, is the site where the structure of Being can be explored (Dahlstrom, 2013). Thus, these two opposing conceptualizations remain embattled with each other. The solution to this problem is to find a union between the two, one that can capture both the immanent and transcendent aspects of spiritual information practices. One way that this may be possible is to provide more clarity to what information behaviour scholars mean by “everyday life”. Savolainen (1995) notes that everyday life is “residual by nature” (p. 266), meaning that it in many ways is defined (unsatisfactorily) by a *lack* of something else. Equally, the divisions of information behaviours into different realms of work and scholarship is only a helpful convention for roughly organizing various research topics. In reality, all information behaviour studies are ‘everyday life’ studies because they occur in the lives of human beings! Everyday life, as a concept used for the purpose of studying information behaviours and practices, requires a more substantive definition. A useful place to start would be with De Certeau and Lefebvre who both studied the concept of everyday life in a rigorous manner. But also, perhaps the best delimitation of everyday life is one from a more philosophical perspective. Is the best delineation of everyday life instead birth and death since it is at these moments when life begins and



ends? But they are not merely events at the beginning or the end of one's life. All present experiences of individuals rely upon having been previously born, and death, says Batchelor (1983), "is not, as we usually conceive it, merely an event that will just happen sometime; it is an ever present possibility in the face of which our actions, either consciously or unconsciously, are to some degree determined" (p. 60). Perhaps spiritual information practices are *lifework*, not meant in the traditional sense of the word, but rather as a sustained effort of transformation and edification across the course of life, for the purposes of a better, more meaningful life. There is a certain amount of labour and effort involved in transforming one's mind; it certainly can be called work. And while there are pleasurable and relaxing aspects to Buddhist practice (particularly through experiencing the results of one's practice), it is not leisure (nor even serious leisure) per Hartel (2010) as two of the three primary characteristics of her theory are not met, that is the conditions of the activities being casual and project-based, which Buddhist practice is not.

## 5.8 Chapter summary

This chapter sought to explore the relationship between information needs, information use, and information outcomes through the enhancement and critique of Dervin's Sense-Making through a Buddho-Heideggerian lens. Textual analysis of Dervin's writings on Sense-Making, Gyatso's writings, Heidegger's *Being and Time* as well as evidence from the qualitative content analysis of *Joyful Path of Good Fortune* and semi-structured interviews were incorporated together to construct the analysis. First, Dervin's Sense-Making was introduced. From within the Dervin-Buddhism-Heidegger triangulation, the human individual and its situatedness in the world was discussed as a foundation to understanding the rest of the chapter. The "essence" of Dervin's Sense-Making was then analyzed. It was proposed that the nature of Sense-Making is *Taking-as*, a hermeneutical act or an imputative act. Next, Heidegger's dimensions of Care were examined more closely as a spiritual path. Care involves three aspects: thrownness, fallenness, and projection. Each of these aspects were discussed. Thrownness was paralleled with the Buddhist concept of *dukkha* and Dervin's gaps. Fallenness was paralleled with the Buddhist concept of delusion and Dervin's power. Projection was likened to gap-bridging. The next section interpreted spiritual information as *authentic* information



which leads to a resolution of thrownness and fallenness. The last section of the chapter considered the tension and duality of the immanence and transcendence of Kadampa Buddhist information practice. The next chapter offers a conclusion to the dissertation through a summary of its findings, a discussion of the significance of the project, limitations of the study, and a short discussion of a future research agenda emanating from this study and the doctoral work of the author.

## Chapter 6

### 6 Conclusion

#### 6.1 Summary of key findings

Research Question 1 sought to inventory the information behaviours and practices of Kadampa Buddhists. The results of the qualitative content analysis of Geshe Kelsang Gyatso's text, *Joyful Path of Good Fortune*, and the semi-structured interviews provided the means by which to complete this inventory.

First, it was necessary to determine what sorts of information New Kadampa Buddhists were seeking and using as part of their ongoing spiritual practice. Three types of spiritual information came to the fore. The first is information-like information which included oral and documentary sources of information such as Dharma teachings and Dharma books. The second was continuum-like information which described a transitional state of information which is the fodder for contemplation. It is between a piece of spiritual information's documentary state and its "final state" as a fully integrated experience, which characterizes realization-like information, the third type of information presented here. The latter two types of information are a novel contribution to (or problematization of) the meaning of information for LIS scholars beyond the first type of information which originally anchored the dissertation within the field of LIS.

Many information practices were revealed to comprise the everyday practice of Buddhism in the NKT. These included social information practices which necessarily involved another person in some fashion. The common practices of listening, reading, giving and receiving Dharma were included in this category. Intrapersonal spiritual information practices were also elaborated upon, which has not been investigated very fully in the LIS literature despite much "information use" happening within the mind. It is perhaps here where the Buddhist context reveals many "new" information behaviours and practices to the universal collection such as remembering Dharma, contemplating Dharma and engaging in placement meditation upon the meaning of the information. These practices are the essence of Heidegger's projection and Dervin's gap-bridging. They are particularly important in resolving thrownness and fallenness in everyday life.

Also discovered were spiritual information practices reflected in other models, notably, Erdelez's information encountering and Narayan et al.'s information avoidance. It was also revealed how important and necessary "colouring" states of mind that are generated by the practitioner, like faith and other virtuous determinations, are in the practice of spiritual information practices. They are important and necessary because they drive motivations for information seeking and use to be authentic and "beyond everyday life".

Research Question 2 sought to uncover the information needs of New Kadampa Buddhists. In particular, the question probed whether there were specific spiritual or existential-level information needs present as motivators for engaging in spiritual information behaviours. Analysis of the data revealed that participants were indeed motivated because of existential motivations such as preparing for death, attempting to find meaning in life, and reducing uncertainty about their human existence. They were also motivated to seek spiritual information because they were seeking happiness, a reduction in their suffering, or for personal or spiritual development. Participants also mentioned that they sought out Buddhism and its teachings in particular because other religions or philosophies provided unsatisfactory answers to their information needs or because these systems of thought failed to make sense to the participants in terms of their lived experience. They also mentioned that they often arrived with one motivation to Buddhist practice but changed it over time to align it more closely with Buddhist thought, such as engaging in their practice for the purposes of benefiting other living beings. This suggests that information needs change and evolve over time as their Sense-Making proceeds.

Another persistent finding was that interview participants were often seeking *experiences* (such as peacefulness or happiness) rather than necessarily seeking discrete pieces of information. Information-like information about how to attain these experiences was sought as a tool to bring about these experiences. This need for experiences also points to a need for the similar, non-documentary, realization-like information.

In the second part of the analysis, Dervin's concept of the "gap" from her Sense-Making methodology was examined as, in part, a useful way to examine the phenomenon of the "information need". It was postulated that the hermeneutic process that Dervin hints at as the essence of Sense-Making can be enhanced with Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics

and Buddhism's philosophy. More specifically, it was suggested that the Sense-Making act, the actual process that resolves gaps and information needs is a process of *taking-as*. That is, entities in experience are taken (i.e., understood) for the purpose of something. While the gap is a useful tool for understanding discrete information needs, the constant taking-as of entities in human experience reveals that Sense-Making is always occurring. Interpretation is constantly taking place and is a *world-creating act* and so the gap is therefore not necessary to be present in each moment of Sense-Making. Using information, then, through taking-as, can function as a method to change one's phenomenological experience of the world.

Dervin's writing on gaps also reveals that she considers gaps to be a fundamental part of reality. This led to the idea that gaps can be understood, in the Heideggerian sense, as being in a state of thrownness or in a state of fallenness. From the Buddhist perspective, gaps can be understood as the pervasive *duhkha* and as pervasive ignorance or delusion, both fundamental causes of suffering. These gaps or needs that were identified point to difficulties in the human condition as the origin of existential information needs and thus in the desire to seek information that satisfied these desires, such as spiritual information. The human condition becomes a question. Therefore, to adequately bridge these gaps, the human condition itself must be transformed in some way.

These findings also challenge the way that the gap is understood. It is not necessarily helpful to think of gaps as occurring linearly, or one at a time, in the experience of individuals. They may overlap, be constitutive of one another, or may never be resolved, echoing findings by Godbold (2006).

Research Question 3 sought to explore whether Buddhist spiritual realizations were an outcome of information use, through the avenue of information practices. Research participants mentioned several outcomes as the result of their personal Buddhist practice. Specifically, they mentioned positive changes to their mood (increased happiness), more developed metacognitive abilities, and permanent changes to their worldview. While these outcomes are not *directly* attributable to their information use (no experiments were conducted), the findings also suggest that information plays some sort of role in the attainment of these outcomes of information use.

Some further explanation of this was provided through Heideggerian and Buddhist thought and Dervin's Sense-Making. They were used to demonstrate how a Buddhist realization can be understood as an outcome of spiritual information seeking and use. First, this involved understanding the fundamental interconnectedness of the human individual and their world (their first-person experience). As a result, the analysis suggested that the power of the mind to create the world can be harnessed to change one's experience of the world. It was forwarded that there has been a failure to recognize the power of the mind to shape the world and consequently, a failure to realize the tremendous power of *information* through informing to shape and create the world

Dervin's Sense-Making provides a base framework from which to begin to explore the connection between need and outcome as she posits a connection between gaps and gap-bridging to outcomes. But Dervin is vague about Sense-Making as was mentioned above, so Buddhism and Heidegger offer the beginnings of an answer. Instead of Dervin's "three point" Sense-Making triangle, the addition of the Buddho-Heideggerian lens points towards a "five-point" pentagon: Situation, Gap, Taking-as, Bridging, and Outcome. This pentagon model separates the interpretive taking-as act from the subsequent actions that actually constitute the bridging. This model is a novel contribution to the research on Dervin's Sense-Making, as well as to information behaviour and practice models.

Taking-as can also be understood as *projection* wherein Dasein is ahead of itself, bringing itself into being through making choices. Using Buddhist spiritual information as a basis for newly projecting oneself, the taking-as process can be controlled and directed in a beneficial way that leads to positive outcomes for the spiritual information seeker. More specifically, one can completely transform one's life experience into the experience of an enlightened being (a Buddha). The purpose of spiritual information practices is to change Dasein's being-in-the-world. At the same time, this directed taking-as using spiritual information resolves the existential information needs of thrownness and fallenness. The problems of existence can only be solved in existence themselves, as Batchelor (1983) suggests. This necessitates Dasein *becoming spiritual information*. Through engaging in spiritual practices repeatedly over a long period of time, the conceptual difference between information-like information, continuum-like

information, and realization-like information breaks down. Not only can realizations be understood as a simple outcome of spiritual information seeking, but more specifically, they can be understood as *authentic* information seeking wherein Dasein owns, or takes responsibility for, its innermost self.

Research Question 4 sought to examine whether spiritual information practices were best understood as either immanent or transcendent. Religion and spirituality often has a dual nature: it is practiced in everyday life, but it has the goal of transcending everyday life. It was suggested that there was no definitive evidence that forced an opinion in favour of one or the other. Spiritual information practices inherit this dual nature from religion and spirituality itself. Spiritual information practices are certainly best studied in the everyday life context, but their focus on ultimate concerns (per Tillich), also pushes them ‘beyond’ the everyday, as Clemens (2010, 2015) suggests.

There is not enough evidence yet to determine whether “beyond everyday life” information behaviours and practices are a distinct area of information behaviour study as Clemens claims (standing alongside work/professional studies and ELIS). However, it was concluded that information behaviour scholars need to (re)consider strongly what is meant by “everyday life” and to form a better understanding of what “everyday life” entails and how that provides a context for information behaviours and practices. There is a need especially to stop viewing it as “residual by nature” (Savolainen, 1995) and instead viewing it as an arena to explore Being as it manifests itself in the present moment of everyday life.

## 6.2 Significance of the project

The primary significance of the project, as was mentioned in the introductory chapter, is that it contributes to the small amount of religious everyday life information seeking studies. Additionally, it also provides the first substantial example of a spiritual information seeking behaviour study with Buddhists as the sample population. Notably, with the aid of the Buddho-Heideggerian lens, the dissertation also offers new ways of thinking about and defining information, challenges folk or unconscious ways of conceptualizing human individuals, as well as contributes in an elaborate manner new ways of thinking about information needs.

It is also significant because of the way that it highlights the use of information as being a large component of religious practice. This fact may not be completely evident but provides a basis for other information behaviour scholars to undertake studies that rely upon a similar understanding of information and information behaviours. The dissertation also contributes to the growing collection of work on Dervin's Sense-Making both through direct utilization of her Sense-Making theory, but also through elaborating upon and critiquing the theory. It also demonstrates the applicability of both Buddhist thought and Heidegger's philosophy to studies of information behaviour and practices. For non-library and information scholars, the informational lens on a religious topic may offer new insight into religious texts and experiences.

Finally, the dissertation is a significant contribution because not only does it contribute to the field of LIS, but offers a foray into developing self-knowledge and understanding, which Arthur argues the academic enterprise has moved away from. He writes:

The information explosion, which is still reverberating all around us and in whose searing heat we all stand, has led to a fragmentation of our priorities, so that attention is rarely given to the basic existential questions which still, at root, must concern us. Instead, even when it comes to religion, that area of human experience which has traditionally sought to address our central purposes most directly, our academic endeavors tend to be concentrated on smaller and more intricate issues, which, however fascinating intellectually, lie at the periphery of who we are, what we are here for, and what our fundamental commitments ought to be. (Arthur, 1989, p. 24)

The research enterprise, however noble it may be, has the danger of being inauthentic. Exploring human nature is not only necessary for advancing the study of human information behaviour, but also for finding meaning in life.

### 6.3 Limitations of the study

While there was an attempt to conduct the study with a high degree of rigour, there still exists some limitations to the findings presented by the study. The first concerns the sample that was chosen. The study relied upon a convenience sample, so naturally the findings are not generalizable to all Kadampa Buddhists, nor to all Buddhists in general. Also, the sample was largely North American (with only a single participant from the United Kingdom). The NKT is established in many other parts of the world

including South America, Western Europe, and Asia so the potential variety in the spiritual everyday life information practices of the people that live in these places was selected out. The English language and cultural homogeneity requirements also performed a similar function that excluded these non-North American individuals from participation in the study.

Some may also argue that a Western Buddhist tradition, especially a controversial one such as the NKT, makes an inappropriate first choice as the population of choice for a study that examines Buddhists. Some may prefer a “more authentic” Eastern Buddhist tradition or a more established Buddhist tradition in the West, but it is hoped that the arguments concerning authenticity were sufficiently addressed in the introduction (see section 1.4.2).

Further limitations concern Heidegger and his work. Quite famously, Heidegger was a member of the Nazi Party in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s. He was a noted anti-Semite and his work was influenced by a strong sense of German nationalism (Segal, 2005). It would be irresponsible not to recognize and acknowledge these facts. The use of Heidegger’s philosophy in this dissertation is not meant to excuse or endorse his controversial thoughts and actions. However, Heidegger’s ontological hermeneutics remains consequential to twentieth century philosophy and warrants examination and utilization, especially in a tradition like Library and Information Science where there is a need for more theoretical approaches. A further limitation is that the dissertation largely relied upon Heidegger’s early work and the way his philosophy is presented in *Being and Time*. Naturally, Heidegger’s thinking about the concept of Being developed over time, and the dissertation does not capture this evolution in his thinking for the sake of operational clarity. In a related way, the triangulation of Heidegger’s, Buddhism’s and Dervin’s thinking also did not allow for much elaboration upon the finer details and intricacies (which are of concern to philosophical scholars) of each of the constituent parts of the theory, especially Heidegger’s and Batchelor’s work, connecting information needs, use, and outcomes and how those might play into the theory. Dervin’s theory in the dissertation largely received the brunt of the critical treatment (not unsurprising in an LIS dissertation). Both Heidegger’s work and Batchelor’s work did not receive the same critical treatment but were rather used more as evidence and commentary taken at their



face value, which could be viewed as a limitation by some. It is hoped that the novelty of the triangulation, at least for the time being, offsets whatever inaccuracies, misunderstandings, or oversights that might be present.

## 6.4 Future research

Early plans for this dissertation sought to include a third research methodology with which to triangulate the results of the qualitative content analysis of Gyatso's text and the semi-structured interviews. This third methodology was to be an autoethnography of the researcher's own experience as a Kadampa practitioner engaging in spiritual information practices that comprise the Buddhist spiritual path according to the Kadampa Tradition. Autoethnographies are "a qualitative, reflexive, ethnographic method where the researcher is also the subject of inquiry" (Deitering, 2017, p. 2). Autoethnographies may appear in a variety of expressions, including radical empiricism (James, 1912). One way to accomplish this radical empiricism is to examine information phenomena as they appear to the mind of an individual engaged in meditation. The meditative state offers an individual a different perspective on the mind since the mind is cleared of large conceptual distractions. While this meditative method would have been especially helpful in examining the intrapersonal information practices mentioned in *Joyful Path of Good Fortune* and by the interview participants, the meditative *epoché* could be used as a method to examine other internal aspects of information needs and uses beyond this study. However, the choice was made to align this project with other studies that had been completed in spiritual information behaviours and practices which involved more traditional qualitative methods, and so this third method was dropped. Nevertheless, there are plans to conduct this study in the future. The Buddhist religion invites the practitioner to deeply observe and subsequently understand their human experience, so it follows that Buddhist meditation techniques can serve in the future as a basis for a rigorous first-person phenomenological method for the study of information behaviours and practices. Similar first-person methodologies have been developed in neuroscience. In the 1990s, Francisco Varela developed the neurophenomenological method (Varela, 1996) to examine the mind and brain both from a physical neurological perspective and through the experiences of the minds of individuals. Generally, there is work to be done on developing the meditational method in and of itself for its use beyond this project.

The development of this research method could provide a research method that begins to satisfy the need for a philosophical, but rigorous research method to continue advancing information behaviour research from its current plateau.

While this dissertation relied heavily upon Heidegger's philosophy and Dervin's Sense-Making, earlier work as part of comprehensive examinations for the doctoral degree seriously explored the inclusion of frameworks, perspectives and paradigms from the fields of the psychology of religion and from transpersonal psychology. While there were small forays into these fields with the odd mention of Emmons and William James, a more sustained application of the dissertation's research findings to these fields would be beneficial. Notably, the religious meaning-making model of Park (2013) has some striking similarities to Dervin's Sense-Making model. It would be interesting to explore the role of information in Park's model and to see if it has anything to contribute to the study of information behaviours and practices.

Furthermore, this research project can act as a jumping off point for further research into the nature of wisdom as an information phenomenon. Realization-like information or the Dharmas of Insight is also known in Buddhism as wisdom so there are comparisons to be made between the research in LIS on wisdom (e.g. Rowley, 2006, 2007; Rowley & Slack, 2009) and the findings uncovered in this project. Naturally, further investigations into wisdom will also force an investigation into the nature of knowledge since it is often difficult to delineate one from the other. While the LIS literature on wisdom recognizes that religion and spirituality are often traditions that have been associated with wisdom, there has not been a great deal of exploration of this fact or interconnection.

Finally, there is an opportunity to further investigate the ways in which Buddhist philosophy and psychology can contribute to LIS scholarship. One such possible avenue of exploration is Buddhism's critique of modern library classification schemes such as the Library of Congress Classification and the Dewey Decimal Classification. In what ways do the Buddhist teachings on the ontological groundlessness (emptiness) of phenomena challenge the essentialist assumptions of these classifications systems? Do faceted classification systems offer a way to respond to this critique? Can faceted classification systems be 'Buddhist'? Another possible avenue of exploration is the use of Mahayana Buddhist teachings (focussed on freeing other beings from suffering) in

training for individuals working front-line service in libraries. Can Buddhist teachings on love and compassion help further develop librarians' and library technicians' service attitude or emotional intelligence? The avenues of potential collaboration from Buddhist teachings, then, can contribute both to the scholarship of LIS as well as to the practice of library professionals.

## 6.5 Concluding statement

This dissertation hoped to make visible and explicit the fact that information and information practices can be, and are, an essential part of religious and spiritual practice. In many cases, such as in Buddhism, information is necessary to achieve a religion's soteriological goals. Previously, the explicitness of this fact was not acknowledged by scholars despite the presence of studies demonstrating how people use spiritual texts or divine beings as information sources. The dissertation also hoped to impress upon the reader that information, at least in a spiritual context such as Buddhism, is a lot more *powerful* than is normally conceived. Yes, information has great utility that helps society to accomplish large-scale tasks such as running economies and governments, but that information can quickly become meaningless in the face of our own mortality or in the loss of a loved one. Becoming aware of the limits of human existence forces a new perspective upon us. It was argued that information can literally change an individual's Being-in-the-world, affecting the way they relate to and perceive objects in their lifeworld. While in the Buddhist context this is a necessary change if one wants to cease suffering, in a more ordinary sense, information gleaned from schooling or learning can equally shape and change an individual's way they exist in the world.

This dissertation also served as a first foray into an intellectual melding of LIS and Buddhism. It is hoped that this study demonstrated the applicability and usefulness of Buddhist ways of thinking to the field of LIS. While Buddhism certainly has faith-based elements that may never be fully engaged with in LIS (such as rebirth or karma, for instance), it is hoped that this dissertation can potentially be a starting place for this relationship to continue.

The exploration of the continuum between the Dharmas of Scripture and Insight in this dissertation was more than an attempt to outline the thread of connection between

information needs, practices, uses, and outcomes. It was also an invitation to begin to explore the role of the *mind* more deeply in LIS and in information behaviour in particular. The mind is a mediator between information and reality, so more effort is needed in understanding its role in information behaviour. Buddhism has an opportunity here to provide its expertise on studying the mind over the past two and half millennia. The mind must cease to be a “black box” in LIS research!

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## Appendix A: Recruitment Poster



### **PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH IN BUDDHISM AND INFORMATION STUDIES**

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study of how members of the New Kadampa Tradition of Buddhism seek and use spiritual information associated with their practice of Buddhism, and why they are motivated to do so. This study attempts to summarize these information behaviours and practices and understand their interrelations.

Participants should meet the following criteria:

1. Are at least 18 years old
2. Self-identify as a member of the New Kadampa Tradition
3. Live in Canada, the United States, or the United Kingdom
4. Speak English
5. Consent to be audio-recorded

If you are interested and agree to participate, you would be asked to participate in an interview where questions pertaining to your spiritual practice will be asked. Your participation would involve one interview session in person (if geographically feasible) or by teleconference (Skype or Facetime) lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes.

By participating in this study, it is hoped that you would come away with a greater understanding of your own spiritual practice or personal spiritual journey.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:  
Roger Chabot (Kelsang Legden)  
University of Western Ontario - Faculty of Information and Media Studies

██████████ or ██████████  
██████████

Version Date: 16/03/2016



## Appendix B: REB Approval Letter



### Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board NMREB Delegated Initial Approval Notice

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Ajit Pyati  
**Department & Institution:** Information and Media Studies\Faculty of Information & Media Studies, Western University

**NMREB File Number:** 107882  
**Study Title:** Buddhist Information Practice

**NMREB Initial Approval Date:** April 27, 2016  
**NMREB Expiry Date:** April 27, 2017

#### Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

| Document Name                   | Comments   | Version Date |
|---------------------------------|--|--------------|
| Recruitment Items               | Recruitment poster                                 | 2016/03/16   |
| Western University Protocol     | Received April 23, 2016                            |              |
| Letter of Information & Consent |  | 2016/04/22   |
| Instruments                     | Interview Questions - Received April 23, 2016      |              |
| Recruitment Items               | Email Recruitment Script - Received April 23, 2016 |              |


The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the NMREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

  
Ethics Officer, on behalf of Dr. Riley Hinson, NMREB Chair or delegated board member

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information: Erika Basile \_\_\_ Nicole Kaniki \_\_\_ Grace Kelly \_\_\_ Katelyn Harris \_\_\_ Vikki Tran

Western University, Research, Support Services Bldg., Ste. 5150  
London, ON, Canada N6G 1G9 t. 519.661.2161 f. 519.661.3907 www.westernu.ca/research

## Appendix C: Letter of Information and Consent



### **Letter of Information and Consent**

#### **The Religious Information Practices of New Kadampa Buddhists Letter of Information and Consent - Participant**

##### **Researcher (Co-Investigator):**

Roger Chabot (Kelsang Legden)

Ph.D. Candidate

Western University, Faculty of Information and Media Studies

##### **Supervisor (Principal Investigator):**

Dr. Ajit Pyati

Associate Professor

Western University, Faculty of Information and Media Studies

#### **1. Invitation to Participate**

You are being invited to participate in this research study about the spiritual information behaviours and practices of New Kadampa Buddhists because you self-identify as a member of the New Kadampa Tradition of Buddhism. Your information behaviours and practices may help library and information scholars better understand the role of information and information behaviours in spiritual paths.

#### **2. Why is this study being done?**

This study seeks to examine what Buddhists do with spiritually-related information associated with their practice of Buddhism such as Buddha's teachings. Reasons for doing the study arose because of a need to fill several research gaps within the study of information behaviour which studies what human beings do with information, in particular it may fill a gap where studies of non-Christian religious information behaviours are lacking.

The purpose of this study is to identify the different actions that are undertaken by New Kadampa Buddhists with information as they engage in their spiritual practice, as well as to better understand the relationship between the reasons



why Buddhists practice Buddha's teachings and their need for spiritual information. Finally, the study seeks to understand the role of information in the development of spiritual realizations.

### **3. How long will you be in this study?**

It is expected that your participation in the study will take place over the period of one approximately sixty to ninety minute long interview session.

### **4. What are the study procedures?**

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to answer questions related to your Buddhist spiritual practice within the New Kadampa Tradition. The questions asked seek to (1) understand what resources you may use in your practice, (2) understand what motivates you to engage in your spiritual practice, and (3) understand the role of written or oral scriptures in your spiritual development. Because of the heightened nature of spiritual practice, some of the questions may be very personal in nature.

Interviews may be conducted in person (if geographically feasible) at a mutually agreed upon location between the researcher and participant, or by teleconference (telephone, Skype or Facetime) if geographically unfeasible. These interviews will be audio recorded using a digital audio recorder. If the interview is conducted via teleconference, only the audio component of the interview will be recorded and not the video component. Due to the limitations of the researchers, interviews will be conducted in English. To participate in the study, you must consent to be audio recorded; it is not possible to participate in the study otherwise.

### **5. What are the risks and harms of participating in this study?**

As was mentioned earlier, there is a potential risk for you to experience emotional upset or distress as the interview questions may probe existential, deeply meaningful or very personal issues. However, you have the complete liberty of sharing or exploring with the interviewer as much or as little as you are comfortable with. There are no known or anticipated risks of physical injury due to you participating in this study.

If you feel that you may require assistance with emotional upset or distress during or following the interview, it may be beneficial for you to seek out the aid of a local mental health professional.

#### **6. What are the benefits of participating in this study?**

According to Buddhist beliefs, the possible benefits to you may be the accumulation of merit out of kindly providing your time to the researcher. By participating in this study, it is hoped that you would come away from the interview with a greater understanding of your own spiritual practice or personal spiritual journey through reflecting upon it. Furthermore, the information gathered in this study may provide benefits to society as a whole through the accumulation of new knowledge on Buddhist spiritual practices as well as on human information behaviour and the relation between them. Also, this research may lead to improved library or educational services for Buddhists and other spiritual practitioners, particularly spiritual leaders, through better understanding the role of information in spiritual practice.

#### **7. Can participants choose to leave the study?**

If you decide to withdraw from the study before it is completed, with your permission, the information that was collected prior to you leaving the study will still be used. No new information will be collected without your permission.

#### **8. How will participants' information be kept confidential?**

Digital audio files of the interviews will be stored on the researcher's password protected personal computer and stored within an encrypted folder. The digital audio files will be removed and deleted from the audio recorder as soon as they are transferred to the researcher's personal computer. The digital audio files will be permanently deleted after five years according to Western University's policy.

Transcripts derived from the digital audio files will be stored on the researcher's personal and password protected computer in the same encrypted folder as the audio files. Back-up copies of the audio files and transcripts will be stored on the researcher's personal external hard drive and will be password protected. Transcripts will be kept indefinitely and may be used for future research and/or teaching purposes.

We will collect your name and email for practical administrative reasons. Your name will be anonymized through the use of a pseudonym in the transcriptions of the interview as well as in any publications that may arise from the collected data. Your email will never be published or shared with anyone. The following details about your person will also be collected and will not be anonymized: country of residence, age, gender, and number of years practicing Buddhism. A master file, separate from any other audio files or transcriptions, linking your

name with your pseudonym will be stored will be encrypted and stored on a password protected computer that only the Co-Investigator will have access to. This master file will be kept until the end of the research project (August 2017) after which it will be deleted.

Your information that is collected will not be shared with third parties. In addition to the Co-Investigator, the researcher's supervisory committee may be privy to audio files and/or transcripts. However, if data is collected during the project which may be required to be reported by law, we have a duty to report. Also, representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

Furthermore, we may use personal quotes arising from the interview within any publications arising from this research. The written consent form below asks your permission. It is customary to communicate the results of the research that participants contributed towards. The written consent form below also asks whether you would like to be contacted with any such results (such contact is voluntary) and also asks you to provide an email or phone number in order to communicate the results of the research to you.

#### **9. Are participants compensated to be in this study?**

You will not be directly compensated for your participation in this research, other than the non-material benefits listed earlier.

#### **10. What are the rights of participants?**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to be in this study. Even if you consent to participate you have the right to not answer individual questions or to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time it will have no negative effect on your spiritual development or reputation within the New Kadampa Tradition. The researcher has no power to affect your standing within the Tradition, nor would the researcher engage in any actions that would harm your reputation within the Tradition.

We will give you any new information that is learned during the study that might affect your decision to stay in the study.

You do not waive any legal right by signing this consent form.

**11. Whom do participants contact for questions?**

If you have any questions about this research study, please contact Roger Chabot (Kelsang Legden) at [REDACTED] or by email at: [REDACTED]

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Research Ethics +1-519-661-3036, or by email at: [ethics@uwo.ca](mailto:ethics@uwo.ca).

**12. Consent**

Written consent will be collected when geographically feasible. The written consent form follows this letter.

Explicit verbal consent will be collected when not geographically feasible.

**This letter is yours to keep for future reference.**



**The Religious Information Practices of New Kadampa Buddhists  
Written and Verbal Consent Form - Participant**

**Researcher (Co-Investigator):**

Roger Chabot (Kelsang Legden)

Western University, Faculty of Information and Media Studies  
[REDACTED]

**Supervisor (Principal Investigator):**

Dr. Ajit Pyati

Western University, Faculty of Information and Media Studies  
[REDACTED]

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me, and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I wish to be contacted concerning the results of this research.

**YES NO**

**If you agree, please provide an email address or phone number:**

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I consent to the use of unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research.

**YES NO**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature (Participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature (Witness)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

---

Print Name

## Appendix D: Qualitative Content Analysis Codebook

- What is Spiritual Information?
- Describing Spiritual Information
- Continuum Between Info/Experience
- Defining Realization
- Information Practices
  - Receiving Dharma
  - Giving Dharma
    - Teaching Dharma
    - Providing Commentary to Dharma
    - Direct Quotation of Scripture
    - Giving Dharma Materially
    - Describing Spiritual Information
- Intrapersonal Practices
  - Contemplating Dharma
  - Meditating on Dharma
- Studying Dharma
- Training in Dharma
- Practicing Dharma
- Social Practices
- Other
  - Reciting Dharma
  - Mantra Recitation
- Negative Information Practice
- IB by Masters/By Role
- Prerequisite Intentions/Minds/Views
- Other Factors to Engaging in Spiritual Information Behaviours
  - Frequency/Repetition
  - Concentration
- Resultant Effects of Spiritual Information Use
- Sense-making/Existential Information
- Ignorance
- Important Things to Discuss/More Information Needed

## Appendix E: Interview Analysis Codebook

- Asking Questions about Buddhist Life
- Being Awestruck with Dharma Word
- Beyond ELIS
- Blunting
- Buddhism and Everyday Life
- Changed Motivation
- Changed Quality of Mind or Consciousness
- Changed Views, Changed Interpretations
- Changing—Becoming ‘Not Me’
- Choosing Dharma
- Conceptualizing the Guru
- Contemplating Dharma
- Defining Information
- Defining Realization
- Dharma as Tool
- Effects of Practice
- Encountering Dharma
- Evidence of Changed Interpretation
- Existential Answer
- Existential Questions
- Feelings of Resolution
- Geshe Kelsang Gyatso as Cognitive Authority
- Geshe Kelsang Gyatso’s Books
- Giving or Receiving Dharma Advice
- Going with the Flow of Information
- Inner Source, Intuition, From the Heart
- It Helps Me
- Listening to Dharma
- Making Sense
- Mantra
- Me Being Practitioner Helped or Hindered
- Meditating on Dharma
- Meditation—Effects
- Memorizing Dharma
- Motivation
- Nature of Info—Dharma as Info for Life
- Nature of Info—Dharma as Practice or Active
- Nature of Info—From Experiences
- Nature of Info—Mind Transformation
- Nature of Info—Words Pointing to Something Else
- Needing People (As Source)
- Obstacles



- Online Resources
- Outside NKT, Syncretism
- Previously Religiosity
- Reading Dharma
- Reasons for Coming to Practice or Teachings
- Receiving “Other” from Practice
- Recitation of Dharma
- Relationship between Getting and Practicing
- Remembering Dharma
- Searching for Dharma
- Seeking Spiritual Advice from Sangha Members
- Senior Practitioners as Cognitive Authorities
- Silence
- Specific Dharma Questions
- Supporting Information Practices
- Taking to Geshe-la
- Unsatisfactoriness with Other Systems
- Using a Spiritual Guide
- Using Dharma for Mundane Problems
- Using Online Resources
- Using Religious Info Practices off Cushion
- Wisdom

## Curriculum Vitae

### Education

*Doctor of Philosophy, Library and Information Science, expected 2019*  
The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada

*Master of Library and Information Science, 2013*  
The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada

*Bachelor of Music, Music Theory, 2011*  
Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

### Teaching Experience

*Course Instructor (GRADLIS 9350: Introduction to Information Behaviour)*  
Faculty of Information and Media Studies, The University of Western Ontario  
May – Aug. 2018

*Graduate Teaching Assistant*  
Faculty of Information and Media Studies, The University of Western Ontario  
Sept. 2013 – Aug. 2017

### Related Work Experience

*Library Assistant*  
Western Libraries, The University of Western Ontario  
Jan. 2018 – present

*Co-op Student*  
Western Libraries, The University of Western Ontario  
Sept. – Dec. 2017

*Research Assistant for Prof. Anabel Quan-Haase*  
Faculty of Information and Media Studies, The University of Western Ontario  
Jan. – June 2017

*Casual Library Assistant*  
Western Libraries, The University of Western Ontario  
Sept. 2014 – Aug. 2017

### Refereed Proceedings

Julien, H., McKechnie, L., Polkinghorne, S., & **Chabot, R.** (2018). The “user turn” in practice: information behaviour researchers’ constructions of information users. In *Proceedings of ISIC, the Information Behaviour Conference, Krakow, Poland, 9-11 October: Part 1. Information Research*, 23(4), paper isic1804. Retrieved from <http://InformationR.net/ir/23-4/isic2018/isic1804>.

McKechnie, L., **Chabot, R.**, Dalmer, N., Julien, H., & Mabbott, C. (2016). Writing and reading the results: the reporting of research rigour tactics in information behaviour research as evident in the published proceedings of the biennial ISIC conferences, 1996 –

2014. In *Proceedings of ISIC, the Information Behaviour Conference, Zadar, Croatia, 20-23 September, 2016: Part 1. Information Research, 21(4)*. Retrieved from <http://InformationR.net/ir/21-4/isic/isic1604.html>.

### **Selected Refereed Conference Presentations**

Life is suffering: Thrownness, Duhkha, gaps, and the origins of existential-spiritual needs for information. *Canadian Association for Information Science 2018*. University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan. May 30, 2018.

Just how open is Open Access?: Exposing problematic elements in bepress' Digital Commons Discipline Taxonomy for institutional repositories. *Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians 2018*. University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan. May 29, 2018.

Experiences of immanence and transcendence in the religious information practices of New Kadampa Buddhists. *Canadian Association for Information Science 2017*. Ryerson University, Toronto, Ontario. June 2, 2017.

Relying upon Sangha as information practice: An example from Facebook. *Annual Conference on Information and Religion*. Kent State University, Kent, Ohio. June 5, 2015.

### **Selected Lectures at The University of Western Ontario**

Combating a Culture of Silence: Libraries and their Role in the Death Positivity Movement. *Mediations* lecture series. February 28, 2019.

Spiritual Tools for Progressive Library Practice. For GRADLIS 9170 *Progressive Library Politics*. October 11, 2017.

Religious Information Practices. For GRADLIS 9350 *Introduction to Information Behaviour*. March 29, 2017 & March 28, 2019.

Buddhist Foundations of Mindfulness. For GRADFIMS 9605 *Contemplation and Mindfulness in the Information Age*. June 21, 2016.

### **Selected University and Professional Service**

Student Representative, Executive Committee, 2018/19  
Canadian Association for Information Science

Member, Research and Scholarship Committee, 2017 - present  
Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians

Graphic Artist, 2016 – present  
*mediations* Lecture Series Coordinating Committee

Student Representative, LIS Doctoral Program Committee, 2013/14  
Faculty of Information and Media Studies, The University of Western Ontario