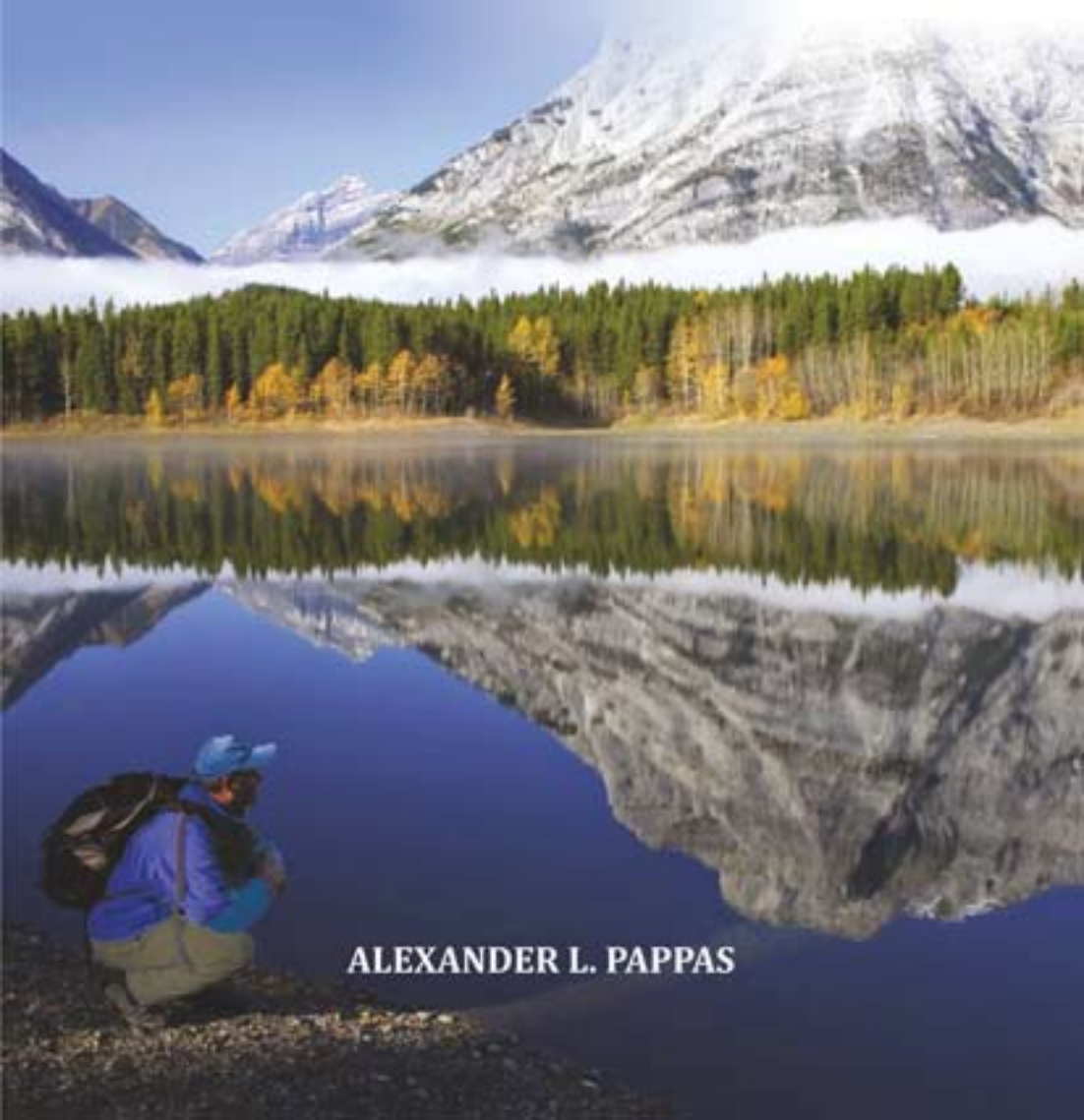


HEAVEN AND NIRVANA

**Duality and Nonduality
in the World Religions**



ALEXANDER L. PAPPAS

HEAVEN AND NIRVANA Duality and Nonduality in the World Religions
ALEXANDER L. PAPPAS

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The Mountain and The Lake



The mountain is the mystery.

The lake is the mind.

The wind is our thoughts.

The gentler the wind the better reflection of who we really are.

The mountain is the ultimate reality which is our true nature. On windy days, the mountain's reflection in the lake is distorted just as our busy minds distort who we think we are. On windless days, the mountain reflects itself clearly in the lake just as our true nature reflects itself in our quiet mind state; at such times we experience who we really are and are at peace with ourselves. In this moment, we have returned to our spiritual source and met ourselves for the first time. Then, and only then, can we begin to love unconditionally. Unconditional love is the ultimate love. To love without conditions and limitations is freedom; it is the way to end a competitive attitude toward others and their paths; love is the way for our own salvation and liberation.

All spiritual paths are a journey to learn who we are and gain a state of unconditional love.

For the Evolution of Human Consciousness

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PREFACE

How I came to be a writer of a world religions book and the spiritual journey is a karmic story of improbabilities. This book is the outcome of many unusual changes I made in my life.

When I was young and inexperienced I naively thought that if I followed a business career I would have a happy life. So I majored in business at UC Berkeley (MBA 1953) specializing in marketing and insurance. I started out as an insurance agent and later had my own brokerage office. I thought I would be wearing a grey suit for the rest of my life. Luckily (karmically) during that time a friend introduced me to Vedanta and later another friend took me to hear an Alan Watts lecture (a great teacher of Taoism and Buddhism) both of which profoundly affected me; intellectually I didn't understand all that was said, but intuitively knew I had heard great wisdom; but at that time I wasn't ready to make any changes in my life: I was focused on 'making a living.' Later I learned to focus on 'making a life.'

After being in business a few years my life changed in many ways because the telephone rang and I was asked to do new things. I didn't seek out change; it came to me naturally (karmically). I was very 'lucky' in this regard. If I ever write an autobiography the title would be '*The Telephone Rang!*' The most important opportunity offered was to teach which I love doing; it was my calling.

The unique changes I went through to become a world religions teacher started with a phone call in 1956 when I was asked by the president of the insurance agents association to teach a technical course in insurance for active professionals at Merritt College that would meet every Tuesday in the late afternoon. I agreed. The first day of class was most interesting; when I entered the large classroom with about 50 present the room fell silent. It was strange and puzzling until I realized the average age of the 'students' was over 45. When they saw this young 25 year old enter they had question marks written all over their faces. They had many more years of business experience compared to their 'instructor.' But I soon won them over with the technical knowledge I had from my MBA training. I taught the course for two years. The evening school dean and I had become friends during this period.

Afterwards, the phone rang again and it was the dean and he had a problem. He had just been notified that the evening economics instructor had fallen seriously ill and would not be able to teach the course due to start the next evening. Could I help and teach the course? I said yes. After this course, I didn't teach at all for a few years. Then the phone rang once again in April of 1961. It was the dean again and he asked me to apply for a full time teaching position at the college. I casually did so wondering if I could handle it if I retained my business which had grown considerably by then. I was also in personal psychotherapy at this time due to another phone call from a friend who recommended therapy knowing I was in a personal crisis at the time. I was offered the teaching position and accepted it setting the stage to be a workaholic for the next decade: two jobs and ongoing individual and group therapy. In 1965 the chair of the economics/business department died and I was asked to take over which I did; after a couple of years of less teaching and more administration I decline to continue as chair.

Soon after starting to teach in 1961, I became friends with one of the school counselors who was a board member of a Jungian organization that had a retreat center about two hours drive north of the Oakland campus. He was concerned about the organizations' insurance program and invited me to review the situation with a visit to the retreat center as a participant in a weekend seminar. I liked the idea of a combined business and growth weekend! I felt at home in the wonderful natural environment of the retreat center where a person could find healing. After that first experience, I started attending their weekend and summer seminars.

In 1972 the phone rang again and I was invited to lunch by my Jungian counselor friend and the dean of the social sciences department that included psychology. I thought they were going to bribe me with a lunch to become the chair person of some committee. I was wrong. They told me that the college was attracting a large number of Vietnam veterans who were enrolling in personal growth classes (held in a 'rug' room without chairs) and another instructor was needed: me. I agreed on the condition I would have one third-time off from teaching so I could return to university for a BA degree in psychology. The dean agreed.

After my second BA, I went on to a second MA on my own. In addition to the 'rug' room personal relations course I also taught basic psychology and personality theory (my favorite). I used a unique personality text that included chapters on Yoga, Zen and Sufism along with Freud and other conventional theorists; my background in Vedanta fitted in nicely. In 1978 the phone rang

again and my friend and colleague who taught the world religions informed me she was retiring early and asked me to teach the world religions course saying ‘you are the only person on campus who knows anything about eastern thought.’ I was not only flattered but delighted at the request which I accepted. By this time I had sold my business; another karmic ‘fit’. The telephone still rings, not to change fields, but to speak and share what I know about the spiritual journey.

It has been a wonderful karma for me to spend these past 35 years teaching and lecturing about comparative religion. Students and friends have urged me to summarize my approach to religion that can lead to inner peace and unconditional love. They have voiced their appreciation of the lighthearted ‘tearing of the veil’ of prejudice and fear that often surrounds religious discussions, and replacing such closed emotions with an open spirit. My students and audiences have responded positively to my view that virtually all religions and spiritual traditions are either dualistic paths of salvation or nondualistic paths of liberation. I was and am grateful they found my dual and non dual orientation toward religion and spirituality clarifying and unique. Their urgings and a lingering concern inspired me to write this book.

For many years I was disappointed that I could never find a book that included a comprehensive discussion of the nondual religions of the world. Nonduality has been neglected to a large extent and it is hoped this unique book remedies that situation by including a detailed discussion of non dual theology and eight of its traditions (along with the three dual Abrahamic religions for balance): the first book of its kind to do so.

All the dual and nondual paths have to do with transforming ourselves. We will discover that the paths of Salvation and Liberation endorse practices and values that transform our ego-centricity into a consciousness of unconditional love. In that process, we can discover the best path for ourselves; for those who already have a path that works for them, perhaps they will be able to see it in an even deeper way.

Religion and spiritual matters are very personal. We are dealing with the mystery of ultimate reality and must let our intuitive heart find our own truth. My goal is to explain and compare without judgment; to inform not to advocate. It is hoped that this book will contribute to religious understanding, goodwill, compassion, tolerance and acceptance.

*Alexander L. Pappas
Berkeley, California*