

In her VOICE

AN INTERVIEW WITH KUWAITI POET NEJOUND AL-YAGOUT

By Jamie Etheridge

Kuwait Times: Tell me about Ounces of Oneness. What is the inspiration for this work? What does the title refer to? What are the main themes/ideas?

Nejoud Al-Yagout: Spiritual awakening is a terrifying journey. We associate it with light; and sugarcoat the darkness. This journey of light, of darkness in itself was my inspiration. The title indicates stepping into the forum of non-duality, in ounces; as the narrator has only grasped oneness conceptually as yet. The main themes are the dark night of the soul, universality in an era of heightened awareness and the energy of universality that kisses our being constantly, asking us to awaken from the illusion of separation and divisiveness.

KT: This is your third book of poetry. How do you see Ounces of Oneness differing from This Is An Imprint and Awake in the Game of Pretending?

Nejoud: I don't believe in favorites, as I change with the flow or flow with the changes, for that matter; but I must add it's different because it was incredibly easy to write, though it wore me out completely. In fact, merely the idea of publishing another book right now makes me weary!

KT: Can you tell me a bit about the evolution of your writing? How has it changed/developed/evolved over the course of the three books? Do you see significant changes in your approach/subject matter/point of view?

Nejoud: I cannot say whether it has evolved, but I am now reaching parts of me that were previously untouched. And I keep tapping more and more into the collective - somehow - as I navigate both my darkness and unknown spiritual terrain. There is more compassion for what we perceive as evil after becoming acquainted with my own demons. This is particularly evident in Ode to a Terrorist. I could have never written a poem like that in the past, because I was trapped in polarized thinking. I still am, but I am aware of being trapped, and the voice inside of me is nudging me toward liberation from polarities via the channel of poetry.

KT: Much of your work is about self-awareness, about the journey of self-discovery and spiritual awakening. How does that resonate with the readership in Kuwait? Do you find that readers understand or get what you are trying to say? Do you think these ideas reflect a frustration within the society as a whole?



Nejoud Al-Yagout. Photographed by Djinane Alsuwayeh

Nejoud: It resonates because it is something within us all, albeit beneath layers of dogma and conditioning.

Sometimes, when I am addressing the divine, readers think I am referring to a lover; but I never interfere with a person's interpretation unless asked to do so. Especially since I do touch on human love often. As for spiritual awakening, people are frustrated with our incessant need to belittle the "other." Awareness is certainly a remedy in that it liberates us from allegiance to harmful institutions that were considered glorious in days of yore.

KT: Some of your work hints at social or political commentary. Such as: Scattered bullets, scraped knees on

side-streets of devotion, a heart bleeding in overdrive, tears for an ounce of oneness Nobody can quite explain it, but we choose to go to hell for one another to find our paradise on the way to: this

Some readers may interpret this as referring to a particular conflict. Do you mean to imply or hint at this or is this a way of using the metaphor of war to describe personal conflict? Do you think that you incorporate violence as a metaphor as a result of the regional turbulence and instability? How does this impact your work overall?

Nejoud: The bullets are representative of war, yes. We must transcend violence and madness in order to reach a point where we no longer feel separate from one another. The tears are all prerequisites for love, for feeling we are one.

This poem addresses the notion that we would willingly enter hell to experience paradise with someone. This is not an enviable position at all; for hell is what arises when we glamorize or grow accustomed to torment. Love is way too grand and has no place in either hell or heaven. The concept of agony and bliss in a relationship is something we will eventually unlearn in order to experience what is beyond both. Otherwise, we will bounce from one extreme to another, as if oft the case with many ships sailing the seas of connection: relationships, friendships, partnerships.

KT: What to you are the most important concerns that poets in Kuwait and region today are discussing?

Nejoud: Censorship. Many writers still write in metaphors or avoiding writing altogether. I have a friend whose poetry would blow you away, and she wants to share her verse with the world; but she cannot publish her work because her family would disown her as she speaks of love and intimacy. How could she know love as a married woman stuck in a marriage of convenience?

In terms of my writing, sometimes I have to provoke others in order to honor what presents itself to me in my inner world. Evidently, if I am defending those who are ostracized, some people may get offended, but the oh yes inside of me is more potent than the oh no! And, in turn, love is more potent than political correctness. Love certainly propels me and is quite insistent.

On a personal level, I am not interested in poking fun at others' beliefs. Even when I employ satirical verse, or criticize our arrogant ways, it is because I am frustrated that we have not yet learned how to love, myself included. Writing is there to assist my own self-evolution and shed my own darkness, first and foremost.

KT: How do you see the literary scene in Kuwait (Arabic or English)? Do you think its thriving or otherwise?

Nejoud: It is thriving. I have been introduced to so many talented writers here, published and unpublished. In terms of language, we should always write in the language of the voice in our heads, regardless of nationality.

WHERE TO FIND 'OUNCES OF ONENESS'

KT: When and where will Ounces of Oneness be available for readers in Kuwait? Will you be doing public readings/book signings or other events that readers should look out for?

Nejoud: It's available on Amazon, Barnes and Noble, FriesenPress, iBooks and other online retailers. My book launch will probably be at the end of September. I never know where my book will end up locally, but Dar Nur and Q8 Bookstore (in the Yarmouk Cultural Center) have been my greatest supporters and always stock my babies. CAP Gallery has also stocked my books before. As for readings, I usual-

ly announce them on social media. The very idea makes me tremble! I always say that publicly reciting is as appealing to me as dancing with lions or waltzing with crocodiles. I don't think I can ever get used to it. But the life-force within me finds ways to get me out there somehow. And, for now, bless diversions and disguises!

www.nejoudalyagout.com
thisisanimprint@gmail.com
[@nejoud.alyagout](https://www.instagram.com/nejoud.alyagout)