

BOOK REVIEW



OUNCES OF ONENESS

by Nejoud Al Yagout

A review by Jamie Etheridge

Letting go of our stereotypes, transcending the labels that bind and define us is never easy. But in her third collection of poetry, Kuwaiti poet Nejoud Al-Yagout takes the reader on a spiritual journey, asking him/her to peel away the layers of preconceived notions, to 'shift the paradigms' of our thinking, to let the masks of our outer selves fall away and to seek a deeper understanding with ourselves and the universe.

I've been a fan of Ms Al-Yagout's writing since her seminal work, *This Is An Imprint*, hit the shelves in Kuwait in 2015. Soft spoken in person and in her poetry, Ms Al-Yagout is a well known literary figure in Kuwait and easily bridges the local vs expat divide, writing in English and often reading / performing at local literary events. Her poetry is smooth and subtle in its approach and yet brave and daring in how it challenges the reader to let drop the veils of self delusion and "rise above superficiality," an all too familiar problem in the world these days.

Al-Yagout sets out to awaken the reader's spirituality, evoking the harmony of love and the universality of inner awareness. She dares the reader through subtle verse and clever wordplay to connect with his inner guru and to seek out self inquiry as a means to enlightenment. Her poems gently poke and prod at our egos and shallow exteriors, taking us for an evening stroll along the waterfront edge of self awareness, where she then invites us to trade haughty conventions for the purity of love and the possibility of renewal.

At times playful and irreverent, *Ounces of Oneness* circles the loci of the soul, gently inviting the reader to closer inspection of the inner. Al-Yagout rejects the muddy, war-torn realities of the external for the swaying, dancing lightness of introspection. She also teaches us through quiet persuasion to relinquish the

labels and social divides we hold dear as in 'Universality':

Allow me the honor to love those you hate,
to include those you exclude
Allow me the honor to make peace with those
upon whom you declare war and allow me to
befriend your enemies
Let me kiss those from other sects, faiths
and make love to the wayward, the wizards,
the astray, the clowns and so-called fools
I didn't come all the way to earth
to love only you
I didn't come all the way to earth
to love only me

In what is definitely my favorite, Al-Yagout pays tribute to the symbolism of her arid homeland in the moving, *Dunes*:

I wash my face in a mirage,
becoming water
I do not care or perhaps I care
too much
about sandstorms,
cacti, falcons
and all that jazz,
but I know so well:
We are dunes.
And I can finally breathe.

Not all her poems, however, seek the sanctity of inner spirituality. As a poet living in one of the most troubled regions in the world, Yagout does not shy away from commenting on the headlines. In 'Ode to a Terrorist', written after a Saudi suicide bomber killed 27 worshippers and wounded dozens more in June 2015 at the Imam al Sadiq mosque in Kuwait City, she takes on the question of ideology, hate and the damage it does.

In simple yet elegant language, *Ounces of Oneness* invites the reader to see past the chaos and, looking inward, recognize the essence of the divine in us all.

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of
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