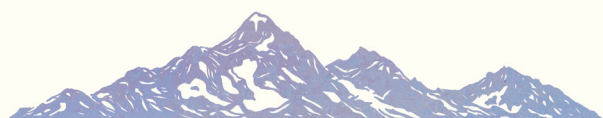


"A multi-faceted gem of a book . . . raw, honest, funny, and soul-stirring. Joan Ruvinsky speaks powerfully to nondual truth in a voice all her own."

—DANNA FAULDS, author of *Go In and In*

OUR
WAY
TO
HERE



*Musings on Nonduality
in Everyday Life*

JOAN RUVINSKY

Praise for
OUR WAY TO HERE

“This is a multi-faceted gem of a book. Joan Ruvinsky’s poetry is raw, honest, direct, funny, and soul stirring. But more than that, her words point to deep and universal truths, each poem reminding me of what I’ve always known but somehow lost sight of in the fray. As a woman, it was especially refreshing to find Joan powerfully speaking to the same nondual reality most commonly addressed by male writers, but in a markedly different voice. I feel changed as a result of reading these poems -- opened, renewed, grateful, embraced, invited into new spaces and ways of seeing. A deep bow to Joan’s close student Kathleen Knipp for shepherding these poems to publication. I will be buying multiple copies of this book to share with friends.”

– **Danna Faulds**, author of *Go In and In: Poems from the Heart of Yoga*.

“*Our Way to Here*, by spiritual teacher, contemporary sage and nature mystic Joan Ruvinsky invites us to love and receive love; it demystifies nondual spirituality, bringing us down to earth enabling us to recognize and remember what has always been here. Her beautifully written musings, poetry, and essays evoke that which is beyond words. The unique, often playful expression of her lived understanding is a transmission of truth from a woman who has awakened and is eager to share the wonder as well as ordinariness of it all. Joan has presented nondual spirituality with a heart grounded in everyday reality. This is a book to savor and sit with in silence, reading a passage after quieting the mind, just being with the flavor of stillness and joyful return home.”

–**Laurel Parnell**, author of *Releasing What Isn't Yours: Living from Your True Self Through Multidimensional Integrative Healing*

“Simplifying non-dualism is in itself a considerable undertaking, but to do it with poetry is an amazing feat! Joan’s unique style invites us to apply the nondual approach as a steadying influence on the ups and downs of the material world.

By reading just one poem a day, *Our Way to Here* gently guides us toward a balanced, sacred life.”

–**Nischala Joy Devi**, International speaker and author, *The Secret Power of Yoga, The Namaste Effect*

“*Our Way to Here* is a touchstone for me, honest, pure and inspiring. The poems and prose are raw and stripped of unnecessary. Joan Ruvinsky’s voice is clear as a mountain stream that reveals the beauty and not-beauty of the stones and the mud as it tumbles toward the river of being and not-being, the ocean of love. This collection invokes chuckles and tears. Thank you, Kathleen Knipp and all who have helped preserve and amplify Ruvinsky’s authentic voice.

–**Amy Weintraub, MFA, E-RYT, C-IAYT**, author of *Yoga for Depression, Yoga Skills for Therapists, Yoga for Your Mood Deck*

“In Joan Ruvinsky’s poetry, we hear the immense silence of the desert, the mountain, and the sky. Her words don’t tell us about this silence – they invite us into a state of joyous awareness in which the silence emerges from within. *Our Way to Here* gains poignancy and power as it slides from discussing the non-duality of life to the non-duality of death: the death of the author’s mother, the death of the author’s sister and finally, the death of the author herself. At the end, we are left like Joan on her deathbed. We are healed from “the misperception of separateness.”

–**Zen Master Matthew Juksan Sullivan**, author, *The Garden of Flowers and Weeds: A New Translation and Commentary on the Blue Cliff Record*

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INTRODUCTION

I believe in levity and brevity. Often the nondual teachings are expressed in such a somber and abstract voice that one would think that such a conceptual approach could not possibly be relevant to our daily lives. How can this “One-ity” possibly relate to the mess I am currently embroiled in? What is this nonduality anyway?

When the sacred and the profane are set apart, that’s duality. When “I” and “other” are set apart, that’s duality. When heaven and earth are set apart, that’s duality.

Simply put, nonduality refers to the fundamental unity that underlies the appearance of diversity.

All manifestation is seen to be an emanation from the ground of a single unitary beingness. Stuff and events as well as the perceivers of the stuff and events are all emissions or condensations of the ground of being.

The contemporary nondual teachings that emphasize awakening can be an attractive alternative to the exigencies of daily life. Many practitioners fall prey to the seduction of the “carrot” approach—there will be an end to my stress, anxiety, or whatever suffering (*duḥkha*) is filling the field of experience right now. Some versions of the nondual approach espouse what sounds like a denial of life, a protection from its messiness, all the while affirming a dry, intellectual aloofness divorced from the radical aliveness that is everywhere present.

First we are told to abandon both aversion and desire, to have no preferences. Then we are told that desire, aversion, and

preferences are all made of the same thing. What are we going to do with that? When trying to make heads or tails of it, it is not very helpful to be told that the heads and the tails are not different. And so it is with “it’s real,” “it’s not real,” “it’s full,” “it’s empty,” and so forth. To top it off, when I really want it to be another way, when I really want a way out of my misery, I am told “there is nowhere to go.”

Perhaps we have become discouraged or even cynical about the hearts-and-flowers promises of the end of suffering and about the onset of permanent peace and bliss. We’ve read all the books, watched all the videos, attended what retreats we could afford, and we’ve done our practices faithfully, and yet, deep down, it still feels like something is missing.

The problem with the pathless path is that there is no road map, much less a set of foolproof or even consistent instructions. And we want guarantees. The last thing in the world we want to hear is that 1) it’s our fault that we’re suffering; 2) suffering will purify us; 3) there is suffering but there is no sufferer; 4) there are no guarantees.

Seeking has led us around in circles, and now we are right back where we started, perhaps now carrying an even heavier sack of failure. The teachings just don’t match that millisecond of clarity we had so long ago. They are just not pertinent. We get super crabby. Then we renounce our membership to the Spiritual Country Club.

The mind can generate so many ideas about how we are supposed to think and live. We are not supposed to have opinions or judgments about our moods, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. We have adopted ideas about how to live in a manner that is nondual and spiritually correct. We may measure ourselves against our self-created image or an image constructed from teachers, readings, or hearsay about what “it” is supposed to be like, or how we are supposed to act.

The phase of “the miserable seeker” is thoroughly and beautifully described by St. John of the Cross (1289- 1340) in *Dark Night of the*

Variations on the Yoga of Nonduality

One advantage of the nondual approach is that there's less to keep track of.

In a nutshell, if "All is Consciousness," then differences dissolve, conflicts resolve, choices are simplified, and everything is seen to be an expression of the source.

The nondual approach more or less takes care of praise and blame, success and failure, subject and object, seer and seen, black and white, red and blue, states of elation or dejection, and so on.

The dichotomizing mind that compares and judges, that is on a continual self-improvement project, can take a rest. The body that is never satisfactory can relax back into its natural vibratory being.

Lest there be any conflict in the yoga community between nondual yoga and a more dualistic approach, each camp historically having brought their considerable wisdom to bear on either side, let us hear from the great eleventh-century Kashmiri Shaivite master, Abhinavagupta:

Perfect nonduality consists in neither rejecting nor accepting duality².

And from the twenty-first-century vocal master Bobby McFerrin:

Don't worry. Be happy.

Timelessness

We are

always looking

through the open door

of each moment

into timelessness.

We just

don't have time

to notice it.

Windows

Why speak of enlightenment and how to

get “there” when everything is

already expressing its home ground with such eloquence—

just now, for instance,

self-effulgent pear blossoms—so white—

the veil peeled from each petal,

revealing original light.

Frosted Glass

All traditions are like looking through a frosted glass window.

There's the Buddhist design, the Yoga design, the Christian design.

What we see is the pattern superimposed on the glass.

With luck, one sees between the frosted parts through the glass to the great vastness beyond.

Rarely does the window break.

Even more rarely does one get sucked through and dissolved therein.

What About Body-Sensing Yoga?

For years, we spend time sorting out what's me and what's not me.

Just when we think we've got all that straightened out, along comes the nondual tradition, inviting us to sense again.

At first, we dutifully sense our bodies.¹⁴ Our aches and pains. How goes the toes, tiddley-pom; how goes the nose? This pose. That pose.

Then the exploration deepens, past the object into the space that contains it, and lo, it seems space itself is sensing us.

Surely, it's one or the other, but not both. Yet sense again. So it is.

Sensing sensing itself, as the boundaries dissolve, and it reveals itself as non-separation.

This non-objective, non-localized aliveness that goes unnoticed in our daily lives is wholly available with just the minimum of a reminder.

If I-ness is aliveness reciprocally sensing aliveness everywhere, there goes me and not-me for good.

This fundamental inquiry yields the gateway to the spaciousness we inherently are.

Seen Through

Once the linearity of time
has been seen through,
the saga of the seeker fragments.

What Is a Nondual Retreat?

Does a nondual retreat mean there are no double rooms? Can I afford a single?

Or is a nondual retreat about getting away from my twosome?
Or my two-ness? Or can I bring him/her/it/them along, too?

One can be a dual citizen. In fact, I myself am a citizen of both the United States and Canada.

Can one be a nondual citizen?

Ultimately, a nondual retreat is where everything is welcome: the fragmentation and the wholeness, the confusion and the clarity.

A nondual retreat is a place where it is no longer necessary to be spiritually correct. A place where conscious napping may have the fancy Sanskrit name “yoga nidrā.” Or where yoga postures are welcome in all their adaptations—form to the wind and feeling to the fore.

If radical self-acceptance sounds appealing to you, a nondual retreat might be a place where you could try it out—or not.

If the freedom of not-doing sounds profoundly familiar, if the joy of being no one beckons, then maybe it might be worth the risk of not knowing what a nondual retreat is and doing it anyway—in a not-doing sort of a way.

By the Creek

Maybe it's
just the way the light is today—
looking upstream,
a single silver ribbon streaming down
to where I sit on the bank of the creek
and downstream,
breaking into manifold bubbles and wavelets,
frothings and streamlets,
each circumscribing its own specific rock
right here the unitary glimmer
gushes into so many particularities
or maybe it's just
where I sit today,
watching the one become many.

Unicity

Although we praise

unicity,

without separation,

we could not appreciate

autumn leaves.

Vigil Poem for My Sister

Here, in the Northeast, it is late August.
The crickets are trilling.

There, in the Southwest,
You are dying among the cacti.

I am long gone.
This is my vigil—
long gone to goldenrod
nodding with the passing breeze.

Now is the dawning of the less romantic part of death—
time to take to heart the words
“pain and confusion of *samsāra*.”³²

Kleine Schwester. Kleine Schwester.

Some people die hard—
it would have to be you,
of course, among them.

My reaching out would only cause more pain—
so I nod with goldenrod and crickets
and watch red overtake the tips of maples.

The beginning of the final flames of autumn,
the liquid fire in your bones visible even here
among the trees.

Living in the Unknown

Life is full of surprises!

We are always living in the unknown, but we do not always know it.

We only know it when something takes us by surprise. We may be pleasantly surprised or we may object vigorously, but ultimately, Life prevails.

This time, Life is prevailing in the form of this physical body dancing its way through incurable cancer.

The details are irrelevant; any prognosis is pure fantasy.

The “I” called Joan is perfectly at ease with this latest version of the unknown, as the body, having passed the 71-year-old mark, is looking for the exit door.

No surprise. No protest. No problem.

Some retreat offerings have been cancelled; others wait with bated breath.

Now what?

This afternoon is a beautiful afternoon, as I watch sunlight gliding across the mountain peaks toward sunset.³⁸

Now

This dying business is very interesting.

First of all, one never knows how long it will last—six months?
A year? Two?

Thus, shining quite a bright light on the present moment—if it
was not there already.

Second of all, absolutely nothing has changed, and nothing is
changing and never will.

Lastly, who knew there were so many beautiful window boxes
on the second-floor balconies in the city—

now visible for no longer being able to sit up in
a car,

but rather reclining on the back seat.

Yes, there is pain, too.

Nothing to add.

Nothing to exclude.

If there is anything else to offer, it would be:

Our Way to Here is a luminous collection of essays, poems, and reflections by spiritual teacher Joan Ruvinsky. Rooted in nondual understanding and resonant with the Advaita tradition of Jean Klein, these writings bring spirituality fully into the textures of everyday life, embracing love and loss, birth and death, the ordinary and the ineffable.

Spanning decades of writing, this collection traces a life devoted to truth. With a voice that is precise, playful, and uncompromisingly honest, Ruvinsky keeps pointing to what has always been present: awareness itself, both intimate and impersonal. *Our Way to Here* accompanies the reader in this lived recognition.

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—ZEN MASTER MATTHEW JUKSAN SULLIVAN, author of *The Garden of Flowers and Weeds: A New Translation and Commentary on the Blue Cliff Record*

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—NISCHALA JOY DEVI, international speaker and author of *The Secret Power of Yoga*



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JOAN RUVINSKY was an internationally recognized nondual yoga and meditation teacher and the author of *This Wind*, a collection of poetry, and *The Recognition of Our Own Heart*, a commentary on the *Pratyabhijñahṛdayam*.

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