



Writings of W. Burney Overton

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A Fantasy about a King

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In many ways, this paper is more than a fantasy about a King. It is my fantasy, about me and my relationship to a King, of whose Kingdom I am a citizen. I must also keep in mind that even my perception about my relationship to a King may be a fantasy. If that be so, then this fantasy becomes a fantasy within a fantasy. That's an odd thought, isn't it?

Does the above paragraph confuse you? I can see how it could. I am trying to say that I need to keep reminding myself that my perception of my relationship to a King could be a fantasy. You know, of course, that I do not believe that what I perceive as my relationship to a King is a fantasy. I just need to keep in mind that it may be. I am well aware that my perception of how things are rises directly out of what I believe. And that I believe this is true of all persons.

I don't know if I have written an explanation or a disclaimer. It doesn't really make any difference, so I'll get on with the fantasy.

The King of my fantasy is, indeed, a benevolent King who loves all his subjects with a love that knows no boundaries. I was – and am – one of his subjects. I have always known that his love of me was such that no belief, thought, or action of mine could give me a right to it, or cause it not to be.

Even though I have always known that the King's love for me had no boundaries, I have not always believed it. It just didn't seem realistic or possible that he loved me without my having done anything to deserve it. Nor did it seem possible that nothing I might do – no matter how terrible – could ever stop him from loving me. Why – how – could it possibly be true?

I am one of those fortunate people. I have always had everything I could possibly need, although not always all that I wanted. I had food – clothing – family – medical care – good school experience – friends – playmates – a good life – as I was growing up. When the time came, I had – and continued to have – a job that produced a sufficient-for-our-needs income. I have a fine wife and lovely children. I knew that all this was mine because the King was so benevolent (or was that why?), even though, sometimes, I wished he would be a little more benevolent.

Was the King really all that benevolent? Sometimes I thought about what I had done and was doing to make sure I had the good life I wanted and believed I deserved. Actually, I wanted it anyway, whether I deserved it or not, and was willing to do just about anything to see that I got it and continued to have it. I went after it and didn't give much thought to how what I did might affect anyone else.

But I couldn't seem to get away from feeling anxious and guilty.

In my formative years, I had been taught that it was required of me to do the right things and be obedient to the King's will if I expected to have any of the rewards of life. I had been taught that I needed to make sure that, in all ways, I was pleasing to him. I

never knew if I was, or what else I needed to do to make sure I would continue to have the good life he had promised me.

You see, even though – as I said earlier – I knew there was no way that I could cause the King either to love me or not to love me, I didn't really believe it. Not really. Not with my heart and being. You know what they say, "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is." Surely, the idea that the King loves me, no matter what, is too good to be true. I've already said that in this fantasy, haven't I?

If this business about the King's love sounds too good to be true, then I'd better not allow myself to believe it. Just as sure as anything, when he finds out that I have broken the rules, he will come down hard on me – punish me in some way. Besides, I told myself, I'd better figure out how to hang on to what I had, and to get more. If the King came through, that would be just great. If he didn't, I still could look to and depend upon my own abilities and resources. I decided that I couldn't really trust the King. It wasn't just that he might be angry with me and punish me. It was also that it was too risky to depend on him for my well-being. I'd better depend on myself. I'd better not count on anyone else. I was smart enough. I had the abilities. I had the access to the resources. I knew enough. I didn't really need the King.

No. I didn't really need the King.

I did need to keep reminding myself that, if I was disobedient, I could be punished – and pretty severely, at that. I could even be banished from the Kingdom. "Banished into outer darkness" was the way I thought about it. That didn't appeal to me.

I could take care of myself. I knew that. But I didn't know if I could please the King enough that he wouldn't decide to banish me from the Kingdom. I felt the fear every day.

Also, I heard the voice of the King every day, "Fear not. I am with you. I love you. You are mine."

I think the King's words; "You are mine." is what really got me. I was just a possession. The King owned me. I was at his beck and call. I was subject to his favor and disfavor. I was just a toy with which he could play.

I wouldn't allow myself to hear the King's words, "I love you. I love you no matter what. You have no obligations to me because of my love."

There isn't any such thing as that kind of love. Love always has its requirements. They are inescapable. So I told myself.

No matter what the King said, I worried about pleasing him. The Laws of the Kingdom were posted everywhere. When I broke one of them, I could never plead ignorance. And the punishment – or what I interpreted as the punishment – was posted

right along with the Laws.

“No obligation,” the King said. How could I believe that?

There was one thing about the Kingdom that I thought was very peculiar. There were no cops – no policemen in patrol cars nor on foot – no one whose job it was to enforce the Laws. Nor were there any jails or prisons. The punishment (as I interpreted it) was posted right along with the Laws, but there was no system in place to require obedience to the Laws. How odd!

If there were no system or person to require me to keep the Laws, then I was free to do exactly as I pleased. Exactly as I pleased. There was something wrong here.

“No,” the King said, “Nothing is wrong. The Laws are posted, together with what you have chosen to call the punishments if they are broken. Nothing is wrong except that you choose to believe that the results of breaking a Law are that I – or somebody – will be putting a penalty on you.”

I pondered what the King had said to me. “Not punishment, but results.”

Not punishment, but results. Consequences. The Laws of cause and effect. If I trip, I fall. If I steal, I don’t trust. I have to try to protect myself against having my possessions stolen. If I hate, I expect to be hated. If I kill, I have to expect to be killed. My life is not safe – no one’s is.

In the same manner, if I am kind, I open the way for kindness. If I forgive, I enable others to forgive. If I embrace others as citizens of the Kingdom also, I help them to embrace me and each other. My keeping the Laws sets the stage for other citizens to do the same, even as my breaking the laws suggests to others that they can break the laws. What none of us can escape is the outcome of our decisions and actions with regard to the Laws.

The Laws, through their consequences, are self-enforcing.

I am getting a glimmer of the scope of the Love of the King for his people. Not only does he love us without our having any obligations to him, but he loves us so completely that he also teaches us the Laws and their outcome so that we can know how to be safe and satisfied citizens of his Kingdom.

That’s real love.

The King loves each of the citizens of his Kingdom. He attaches no obligation and no requirement to his love. That being the case, it seems that the King would see to it that all his citizens enjoyed the good life all the time – no difficulties – no upsets – no broken relationships – no abused children – no poverty – no nothing that interferes with the good life. Surely the King could do that.

I knew that life within the Kingdom was not trouble free. And I was beginning to see that the reason was because we, the citizens, choose not to keep the Laws. No. We weren't being punished. We were bringing the troubles on ourselves – the to-be-expected consequence of our choices.

I pondered some more. Slowly, I came to understand that trouble in my life and in the Kingdom was yet another measure of the immeasurable love of the King. That sounds odd, too. That is, until I really think about it.

If the King took care of everything – left me with no decisions to make – saw to it that every part of my life was untroubled – set aside the consequences of my failure to be guided by the Laws of the Kingdom – what would happen to me? In other words, if the King just took my life over so that I had no decisions to make and no responsibilities to meet, what kind of life would I have?

No kind of life, that's what kind. Nothing to intrigue me. Nothing to challenge me. Nothing to enable me to taste and feel what it means to be citizen of the Kingdom. No real joy or satisfaction. The King is too wise and too loving to impose that kind of life on any of his people. As I thought about it, I could see that this was true. I really like the fact that I have choices – that I have a significant role in determining how my life turns out.

I have come to understand that the Laws of the Kingdom are really guidelines to enable the citizens to have a fruitful and satisfying life. When I choose to observe them, my life is and always will be the complete life the King seeks to provide for all his people. And the teachings about consequences give me a clear picture of what happens if I choose not to observe them – not punishment imposed, but just what I can expect the results to be. I'm not in the dark about that.

But I am in the dark about my ability to apply the Laws in my life. Not much of what I observe among the citizens of the Kingdom shows me how to do it. Too few of them seem to believe that keeping the Laws of the Kingdom is the way to a fulfilled life. They don't seem to see that loving and taking care of one another really works to bring into being and keep a community where people are safe and secure, in which the needs of everyone are provided. They seem to believe – in the main – that it is up to each person to provide for self, however that is done.

The messages from the King are clear and consistent. "I love you – believe it or not. I equip you quite adequately – believe it or not. I provide all the opportunities you could ever want – believe it or not. I support you every step of the way – believe it or not. I release you to do with it what you will – believe it or not."

Could I allow myself to believe these messages?

Then one day, I heard another message from the King. Maybe he had been saying

it all the time, and I just hadn't heard it. "I became one of you and lived among you. As one of you, I kept the Laws; I loved my neighbor as myself; I lived as I have created you to live. Maybe you remember when that was. The citizens of my Kingdom did not believe me.

"No, that the citizens did not believe me is not correct. They did believe me and felt very threatened. It seemed to them too great a sacrifice to go about doing good, as I was doing. So, to try to remove the threat, they killed me."

"But," the message from the King continued, "killing me when I was one of them didn't alter the rightness of my message, nor disprove my way of life among the citizens. I lived what it meant to have the fully satisfying life that each of my citizens can have – and it isn't measured by possessions, comforts, status, or any other things than loving service. It is possible to every one of them."

Yes, I remember when that was. He lived among us, and we refused to recognize him – most of us did. He didn't have anything. He wasn't great as people measure greatness. He just had a fully satisfying life. It occurs to me that "benevolent" may not be the most descriptive word for my King. Maybe the most descriptive word is "loving" – loving without any limits. Benevolence, kindness, mercy, forgiveness, all fit the King, but loving is the word that really describes him. And he lives among us, full of grace and truth.

My King.

I think I have come to the end of my fantasy about a King – and me as a citizen of his Kingdom. I hear yet another message from him. "Believe it or not," he is saying, "you already have a good life. It isn't imposed on you. It doesn't come to you as a reward. It is for you to decide if you want it or not. If you decide that you really want it, the good life comes to you in the living."

"In the living," my King said.

This is the end of my fantasy about a King.