

Spiritual

Rationality

A Common Sense, Empowerment Manifesto

written

by
Steven B. Orkin

with
You

Introduction

This book is a conversation between me and you. I don't know you. We have never met. We will likely (and regrettably) never meet. But that doesn't preclude us from being well-met just the same. We're engaging in an act of magic, right at this moment. Separated by miles and all sorts of other factors, we have nevertheless connected, even in just these few lines. Some unknowable force or forces have conspired to intersect our orbits and bring us together here and now.

Alternately, maybe our meeting here today is simple serendipity, with no grand design behind it whatsoever. It's an interesting dichotomy, is it not? There's a certain comfort in both options, even though they seem at odds with one another. That's one of the things we're going to talk about as we embark on what I hope will be an intimate, enlightening, provocative, interesting, and even fun journey together.

But before we do, we need to do a bit of housekeeping. We need to establish some ground rules and understanding about the dynamics of our relationship. We need to talk about expectations.

To that end, I need to be up front about something. I'm writing this because I need your help, not just the other way around. The act of sharing all these thoughts and

ideas swirling around in my head, the knowledge that you're reading and thinking about these words, the possibility that by speaking my truth, I may help you, if only in some small way, brings me peace.¹ Even though I'm the one doing the writing, I really do consider this a conversation. We're in this together. It's a 50/50 split. Even/Steven, you might say.

Next, I like to think that I'm fairly intelligent. I like to think that I've got a decent dose of emotional intelligence and a few sparks of insight. I like to think I'm pretty good with the language, and that I'm passionate about using it to make a difference. Regardless, it's essential that you understand that whatever attributes I may have don't make me any less lost, flawed, and full of yearning than you.² There are no fancy degrees after my name. I'm just a guy who felt inspired and driven to share this 'Common Sense, Empowerment Manifesto' with the world. I

¹All of us live secret lives to some extent, but this is particularly true of 'pathological introverts' such as myself. We present our composed, reserved, manufactured facades to the world. We often conduct ourselves the way we feel we are expected to behave, rather than how we actually want to behave. Do not mistake a calm appearance for calmness. Follow your instincts and intuition. Take a moment to ask the question (as cliched as it is) "How are you?" with the understanding that it is the most intricate question you can ask an introvert. Assuming you really do want to know the answer, do not content yourself with the typical "Fine" auto-reply we will very likely give you. Introverts *want* to talk. We *need* to talk. We just don't know how. We spend vast portions of our lives trapped in the cages of our own reserved demeanors. During my college days, I studied Theatre and Music at Shenandoah College & Conservatory of Music (now Shenandoah University). The head of the Theatre Dept, and my professor for my primary acting and directing classes, was Harold Herman. Dr. Herman was a fine actor and teacher, and was always very supportive of me. During one of my Directing classes, he was speaking to one of my classmates about a one-act play she had directed, in which I had appeared, titled 'The Valiant' (I played a priest, an interesting experience for a Jewish guy). The central character of this play is this very enigmatic man charged with murder who refuses to reveal why (or even if) he committed the crime. Dr. Herman was telling her that she should have considered me for the role (though to be fair, the guy who played it did an excellent job). In explaining why, he told her, "There's something secretive about Steve. It's like he wants to tell you something, but he can't." I don't think anyone has ever come closer to describing me than Harold Herman in that moment. This book represents some of the stuff I want to tell you.

²Indeed, I may be more so. I consider myself to be fundamentally broken in certain respects.

have no illusions or delusions about my ‘Great & Powerful Oz-ness’ and you shouldn’t either. There are things that you do every day, things you don’t even think about, that I can’t match on the best day of my life. My point is, I’m not your guru. I’m your companion. We have come together to palaver, to figure stuff out together. Though I’ll share some things about myself, my thoughts, feelings, experiences, and struggles, it’s essential that you understand that this book isn’t about me. It’s about us.

Together, we’re going to learn to look at the world in a different way, and thereby help make it a better place (or at least improve our experience with it). If all goes as I hope, we may even teach each other to be better people. We’ll talk about things that matter. We’ll use the concept of Spiritual Rationality to help us try to make sense of an often confusing, chaotic, and sometimes merciless world that nevertheless is filled with love, joy, wonder, possibility, and potential. We won’t always agree, but I’m not here to convince you of anything other than the need to consider multiple perspectives.

You will likely find this book to be different in tone from other books on empowerment and spirituality you’ve read in the past. My goal is for us to discuss aspects of self-awareness and empowerment in a way that has a grounding in the real world. Certainly, there will be commonalities with other such books. We’ll talk about things like the importance of gratitude, self-respect, integrity, and

divinity, but we'll also be talking about the 'War on Christmas', corporate greed, racial inequity, bad driving, social media, and the anti-vax movement.

I'm going to do my best not to beat you over the head with the SR concept. I want to leave it to you to consider the things we talk about and determine for yourself how SR has been employed in my thought processes on a given topic (though I will ask questions of you). The goal here is to empower you to find your own answers, just as I'm looking for them myself in writing all this stuff down. Together, we can create something thought-provoking, even beautiful, in its way.

As we make our final preparations for our unconventional journey, I'd like to thank you, my new and remarkable friend. Thank you for reading this, and for taking this journey with me. I'm excited and I hope you are, too. We've got a long road to walk together but I'm hopeful it will be well worth the effort.

Make sure your travel cloak is securely fastened and that your boots are tightly tied. You'll need a walking stick to help chart the terrain, a sturdy, wide-brimmed hat to shield your eyes from the sun, a nice big water skin to keep you hydrated and focused, and a few gold coins to cover unanticipated expenses. We'll figure out anything else we need along the way.

Ready? So be it! Let's shake hands, wish each other good travels, and step forward with confidence into possibility, opportunity, understanding, potential, and maybe, just maybe, a little magic...

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## Orkin's Laws

### **Orkin's Law of Serendipitous Possibility: To embrace Life's full potential, we must maintain our willingness to be surprised.**

Have you ever heard voices in your head? I hear them all the time. Fortunately, they've never said things like, 'Kill your parents,' or 'Rob that bank.'

Maybe the voices are nothing but neurological phantoms, churning out information that happens to fall into configurations consistent with what we perceive to be insight. Maybe the voices are intuition, the products of a clear and open channel to the divine.

The latter explanation is a lot more hopeful (we'll be talking about hope shortly), and it's the one I elect to believe, but I don't really know for sure. All I do know is that in Autumn of 1993, I began periodically receiving messages in the form of maxims. I started writing them down and as of this writing, my collection is nearing 200. I assume very little responsibility for creating them. For the most part, I'm just frantically scribbling them down before they disappear.

After recording a few of them, my muse informed me that they weren't complete in and of themselves. They needed a sort of label. Even at that time, so long ago,

I'd learned to trust my intuition<sup>3</sup>. After letting the message simmer for a few days, I found myself thinking about 'Dungeons & Dragons' of all things.<sup>4</sup> I'd learned the game in high school, continued playing through college, and periodically thereafter, ultimately running some adventures for my daughter and her friends in a wonderful full-circle moment.

Anyway, I took a metaphorical rowboat out into the middle of the game's vast lake of imagination, structure, and mythology to figure out what the hell the connection was between my maxims and fantasy roleplaying. Then it came to me: It was the spells! Most of them are just descriptive ('Invisibility', 'Fireball', 'Hypnosis', etc.) but there are also really colorful with names like 'Otto's Irresistible Dance', 'Mordenkainen's Faithful Hound', 'Aganazzar's Scorch'. I loved the playful, mysterious quality of these latter spell names. I wondered if there was a way to incorporate this whimsical use of language to 'brand' my maxims.

As it turns out, there was.

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<sup>3</sup> Largely due to the work of one of the people this book is dedicated to: Shakti Gawain.

<sup>4</sup> Roleplaying games, particularly D&D, have at times endured storms of controversy over being "satanic" or otherwise dangerous. Nothing can be further from the case. Indeed, roleplaying games are galaxy-sized reservoirs of creativity, fun, and social interaction. They are vastly more immersive and imaginative than the most cutting-edge computer or online game out there. Tell your teen to turn off their phone, tablet, or laptop, and get them into a REAL game.

I came to (sardonically) identify the maxims as 'Orkin's Laws'<sup>5</sup>, defining them as "A brief statement of belief, alternately playful<sup>6</sup> or philosophical in nature. Often both." They initially formed the foundation of my blog, 'Orkin's Law,' but the blog has taken on an identity of its own over time so it's sort of a separate entity at this point<sup>7</sup>. I've shared OL's on Facebook, stuck them into my email signatures, and used them for essays I've written over the years, but I haven't really done anything of substance with them, which has bothered me quite a bit. Given the mysterious, almost magical manner in which they've materialized in my life, I've always felt they were meant for something bigger, some sort of focused, cohesive purpose.

This is it. This is what they were meant for. This book. This conversation. The OL's will serve as road signs, periodically providing direction and clarity with regard to how and where we proceed on our journey.

Let us begin...

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⁵ Over the years, various people have suggested that I refer to them as 'Orkinisms.' It's cute and catchy, but the term has just never felt right to me.

⁶ The "playful" aspect includes some liberties with vocabulary, e.g. use of the terms 'actualizationary' and 'perspectivistic', which aren't real words, but are 'word-ish.'

⁷ Though I will be drawing on some information from the blog for use on our journey.

Spiritual Rationality Defined

Orkin's Law of Sardonic Revelation: The sad truth is that 'Common Sense' isn't nearly as common as we've been led to believe.

There are forces within our 'civilized' society that consistently strive to polarize us. Most of these forces pertain to political agendas and money. Divisiveness, exclusionary thinking, and ignorance serve the purposes of such forces. A divided population, a divided nation, a divided world, is much easier to manipulate.

Spiritual Rationality⁸ advises that you not allow yourself to be seduced by ideological charlatans. Have no illusions: there is MUCH more drawing us together than pulling us apart. We CAN make a difference. We ARE powerful. We ARE one, even with (and perhaps because of) all our spectacular diversity. We should not be pointing angry, accusatory fingers at each other over such differences. We should be embracing them, looking to them for opportunities and potential to grow as a civilization, as a species, as individuals. This does not mean our diversity needs to be diluted into a murky, gray gestalt. It means we need to make reasonable compromises and allowances for others, and they need to do the same. SR is about rediscovering the joy, beauty, and power in the art of civil discourse, regardless of the topic or how strongly people feel about their own

⁸ I keep trying to make 'Spi-Rat' work for myself, but every time I do, get a cartoon in my head of a ghostly, six-foot rodent, so ixnay on the conjunction.

perspectives. If we boiled the thing down to one sentence, it would be, 'Concept A does not preclude Concept B.' SR is about finding the center. It's about discovering and embracing common ground.

So, let's do that. Let's find the common ground. Let's have the hard conversations. Let's respect each other's opinions even when we vehemently disagree. We can be resolute, we can have conviction and audacity, but if you're going to take this walk with me, leave your zealotry in the trashcan where it belongs. It has no place here.

This is NOT to say that SR is about 'waffling' or 'not choosing a side.' Finding points of moderation within a belief system doesn't mean you lack resolve, conviction, or passion. Indeed, you will find I am very passionate about the topics we're going to talk about. However, within that passion lies a sense of consideration and discernment. My thoughts are not the results of ranting and raving, or 'putting it out there.' I'm not a provocateur. I don't stir things up for the sake of stirring them up. I stir them up because they need stirring.

At its heart, our conversation is about the dangers of extremism. Indeed, I think it's fair to say that the only thing I'm extreme about are those very dangers. Extremism in most any form is bad.

Let me give you an example of what I mean by that. I'm walking through my town. I come to a major intersection, at which the elderly Mrs. Murdock, who lives nearby, is carrying grocery bags, waiting for the light to change. Seeing that she's struggling somewhat, I turn to her and say, "You look like you're having a little trouble with those bags, Mrs. M. Can I help you with them, at least to get you across the intersection?"

She responds in one of two ways:

- 1) She smiles at me gratefully and says, "Thank you, dear. That would be very helpful."
- 2) She smiles at me gratefully but says, "Thank you, dear, but I have to do these things myself."

I would respect her second response but I would be concerned for her. I would likely follow her across the intersection at a distance or at least watch her to be sure she got across okay.

In this version of the story, I assess the conditions on the ground. I afford Mrs. M the respect of making her own decisions. If she thinks she can get across the intersection effectively, I'm willing to trust that that's the case. As a concerned citizen, I keep an eye on her in case she's wrong. If she did have trouble – she

drops one of her bags midway across or gets overwhelmed by the light turning green before she gets across and people start honking their horns at her – I'd go out and help her. That would be an act of compassion, not intrusion. This seems to me to be a reasonable means of navigating that situation.

Here's Version B of the story, in which I'm an extremist about helping little old ladies across the street.

I'm walking through my town. I come to a major intersection, at which the elderly Mrs. Murdock, who lives nearby, is carrying grocery bags, waiting for the light to change. I reach over and slip the bags from her arms and tell her, "Mrs. M, I'm helping you across the street."

She responds in one of two ways:

- 1) She's a little taken aback by my forthrightness but nevertheless smiles at me gratefully and says, "Thank you, dear. That would be very helpful."
- 2) She's a little taken aback by my forthrightness. She reaches over to retrieve the bags from me and says, "Thank you, dear, but I have to do these things myself. May I have my packages back, please?"

Response 2 is not acceptable. I'm 'Helping Old Ladies Across the Street' Guy. That's what I do. That's how I define myself. I've made a decision to help Mrs. M, so I'm helping her. No negotiation necessary. If she doesn't like it, tough. What's she going to do about it? She'll like me when I'm done.

Though my fundamental intent – to make sure Mrs. Murdock gets across the street safely – is positive in nature, I'm sure you can see all kinds of wrong in Version B. Even with her Option 1 response, I didn't actually ask her if she wanted my help. I told her she's getting it. What she thinks or wants doesn't matter. In fact, Version B has absolutely nothing to do with Mrs. M. It's all about ME. My needs. My objectives. My decisions.

Extremism is consummately self-involved. It's rigid and unyielding. It lacks versatility, inclusiveness, intelligence, imagination, and curiosity. That makes it antithetical to Spiritual Rationality ideology.

Note that I don't need you to agree with me on any of our topics of conversation. I want you to use my thoughts and opinions as springboards to draw your own conclusions about the world. I'm going to share one of my favorite quotes with you. It's from one of the people this book is dedicated to: world class writer extraordinaire Harlan Ellison. The quote is this:

“You are not entitled to your opinion. You are entitled to your informed opinion. No one is entitled to be ignorant.”

My goal, therefore, is to help inspire you (and me) to be more informed, to look deeper. By more crisply defining your own perspective, you help yourself, and in a broader, esoteric sense, the world beyond. You imbue substance and strength into the fabric of Human experience. You can approach life more confidently and face adversity with a more organized and refined toolbox.

It's often tempting to just 'go with the flow', do what's easiest to make your way through this life. SR is not about 'easy'⁹. It requires intelligence¹⁰, creativity and inventiveness, commitment and conviction, strength (of both spirit and thought), receptivity and flexibility, courage, patience, compassion, and grace. If you want easy, don't let the door hit you on the ass on your way out.

Some people (maybe you), upon hearing the phrase 'Spiritual Rationality' respond to it by saying, "Oh, I see. They're opposites." or "It's an oxymoron."¹¹ This is absolutely not the case! The fact that spirituality cannot be fully explained or defined by the same empirical protocols as science does not make it irrational! The fact that science perpetually asks questions and searches for answers does

⁹ Though it's critical that you understand that "easy" isn't necessarily a synonym for "simplicity". "Easy" is the path of least resistance. "Simplicity" is more versatile. It has more elegance, flow, and substance.

¹⁰ Just so we're clear, being "intelligent" has very little to do with being educated. I've spoken to people who barely graduated high school whose opinion I value more than some PhD's I've met.

¹¹ An oxymoron is a pair or group of words that appear contradictory, e.g. 'original copies,' 'deafening silence,' or as famously observed by the late, great Groucho Marx, 'military intelligence.'

not make it ungodly. SR is not about 'heart vs head' or 'science vs faith.' It's more robust and complex than that. It values both perspectives while acknowledging that each has limitations. The road to salvation, wellness, actualization, and transformation lies in our marvelous Human capacity to incorporate the abstract and the concrete into our worldviews. Sometimes, one takes precedence over the other but neither is ultimately superior.

Spiritual Rationality is a call to arms for the power of understanding, common sense, and compromise. It is an accessible, tempered, nuanced ideological perspective that advocates inclusion over exclusion, unity over anarchy, and an awareness that asking the right questions is often as important (sometimes more so) than getting the right answers. It is a philosophy that fully encompasses both terms making up the phrase. It is a path forward through the darkness, a beacon of hope in an often-discouraging world.

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