

# Called to Purge

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When the old Master Yokujo was asked, “What is Zen?” He said, “When hungry eat. When tired sleep.” They said, “Well isn’t that what everybody does? Aren’t you just like ordinary people?” He said, “They don’t do anything of the kind. When they’re hungry they don’t just eat, they think of all sorts of things. When they are tired they don’t just sleep, they dream all sorts of dreams.” I know the Jungian’s won’t like that one, but there comes a time when you just dream yourself out—no more dreams. You sleep deeply and breath from your heels.<sup>1</sup>

**T**wo Whopper Jr.’s, a crispy chicken sandwich, a fry, a coke, and a friend. One could argue that’s really what brought me to this very moment. On March 29, 2008, eleven years to the day after I had been baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I found myself sitting in a Burger King restaurant booth with John Wilkes Booth—a good friend of mine who was playing the role of Booth in our Weber State University student production of the Stephen Sondheim musical, *Assassins*—wondering whether or not it was the right choice for me to submit my papers to church headquarters so that they could assign me to my two-year mission. I was still part of the generation of missionaries who were encouraged to get at least one year of college completed before heading out into the mission field. This would later change, as it would become evident that, for various reasons, sending us away to college first drastically increases the chance that we will not serve a mission. Out of my freshman college class, by the end of the first year I was the only one still Mormon, the only one still heterosexual, and thus the only one considering submitting my mission papers. Similar patterns had occurred in the sophomore, junior and senior classes ahead of us. I was surrounded by ex-Mormons who had decided not only to not serve their mission, but to leave the church entirely.

I wasn’t leery to serve because I had started my college career, nor because I was unworthy or unbelieving; I had a college program, a scholarship, a job, and a daughter of God all promised to be there waiting for me upon my return, and I had prepared faithfully. My caution to serve was due to my health, and my inherited proclivity toward agoraphobia.

There were many around me who struggled with the idea of me serving a mission, and there were those around me who struggled with the idea of me not serving a mission. There were those who knew of my health struggles, and feared that being away from home and doctors would only be a detriment to my situation, causing my health to worsen and decline; but this could of course be location dependent. Then there were those who knew of my health struggles, and knew I and others were considering having me

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<sup>1</sup> Watts, Alan., *Zen Bones*, 1967, online at <https://www.organism.earth/library/document/zen-bones>

stay home to do a service or temple mission instead. But they didn't like that idea. One March afternoon I answered the ring at the front door and found myself face to face with a gentleman from the United States Army. A bit surprised, I said, "Oh, um, hi. How can I help you?" "Are you Christopher Shenefelt?", he asked. "...Yes.", I responded, very confused. "We received the information you submit about wanting to learn more about joining the Army. I'm here to talk to you more about that." This was news to me, so I informed him, "I haven't been interested in joining." This seemed to confuse him, "You've never expressed interest before?" "No, I haven't, sorry." He looked even more confused. "You're sure? It's ok to be nervous I know it's a big step to make." "No, like I'm mostly not interested because I've never thought I'd be healthy enough to do so." "You're sure you never sent us an inquiry?" He asked. "I'm positive. Why?" I responded. He informed me that, "We don't make house calls unless we have serious inquiries, which require submitting sensitive information like your social security number. Do you know anyone who may have submit for you?" I was shocked, and said, "Well there's no way my parents would. We're literally trying to decide whether or not I'm healthy enough to leave on a two-year church mission soon."

Once I brought up the mission, he appeared to understand the situation in a way I didn't at first. He informed me that it was likely someone close to me, and that it is highly illegal to do such a thing. He apologized for interrupting the afternoon, wished me luck, and went on his way.

Regardless, there I sat in the Burger King lobby, still trying to decide, weighing all trusted opinions, on whether or not I should serve this mission. My friend knew that this was the point of us venturing off to dinner together. He told me that he sincerely understood my dilemma, as he struggled with chronic health issues as well, but he testified that despite these added challenges, the decision to serve a mission was a highlight in his life, and a necessary component of what helped him grow into the man he was still becoming. It was a strong testimony, and it did indeed muster the remaining energy needed within me to lift the packet of mission papers into the mailbox to await my assignment.

At this point, even amidst my extended family, I was only the third person to serve a mission. My uncle served in Brazil well before I was even born, and an older cousin of mine served in Portugal and Cape Verde over ten years before I was called. Other family members who would've otherwise served were either in wars or had serious health anomalies that exempted them.

I received my patriarchal blessing on June 10. It revealed that I am blessed with the gift to learn a foreign language, as the opportunity would come to me at *some time*, while also revealing that my call to serve would be a high point in my life for various specified reasons. And so I waited.

I received my letter on July 15; called to serve the Lord and his people in the Cape Verde, Praia, Africa mission. My immediate family and I had actually never heard of it. We didn't know that cousin Adam had served there as part of his Portugal mission a little over a decade before. No one in my ward had heard of it either. At the time it was the smallest mission for the church apart from the sister missionary mission at Temple Square.

As part of tradition, each missionary in a ward receives a plaque with their missionary picture, and a chosen favorite scripture. This is displayed in the foyer display case while the missionary is away serving, so those in the ward can remember their service, and keep in mind their families who are missing them. I debated between my tire favorite scripture, Ether 3:19, and another favorite that I felt pulled toward for some reason, Revelation 2:17,

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

Several people asked me if I was sure this was my choice, as it wasn't one they were expecting. It doesn't scream missionary work, nor testimony of the Savior and the restored gospel. Some even asked why not Revelation 2:7, which has essentially the same message but without the added component of mystery. Mostly people seemed concerned it wasn't missionary focused, I wasn't even positive why my nineteen year-old clueless self was so keen on it, but I was. And so this was the missionary message I put forth in the Fall of 2008, which is a message by which I still stand: overcometh, and receive.

I entered the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah on the afternoon of Wednesday, September 24. I had no companion. One was assigned, but he was going to be a week late because he had a court date and case he needed to settle first, so some things were adjusted and I was reassigned to another elder. He didn't have "past criminal history" vibes in the least, and he already spoke Portuguese fluently because his father had once served as the mission president for Brazil, and so he had grown up learning Portuguese. We received our tour of the facilities, met our language instructors in a short evening class, had dinner, attended a devotional, and then headed back to our dorm to retire for the night. We settled in around our personal study areas, did our scripture study, and went to sleep.

I was aware of a vast and dark abyss. I was floating in some liminal kingdom awash with the sounds of the ocean, suspended in a timelessness known only to the gods. Suddenly, I found myself being hurtled through a black and white, swirling vortex which let out a roar that pierced me to my core, knowing that it emanated from a spacelessness where the depths are hollow. I was released from the vortex in a wisp. Feeling a shift in the nature of gravity, I had met up with the night sky and began gently descending through the clouds and down toward Praia, Cape Verde. Swirled through a round-about, I beheld myself that I was floating along a somewhat sepia-toned roadscape with many branching avenues. Traveling down Ave Cidade de Lisboa and past the Sucupira markets. I floated across an open landscape where the color had restored itself, and which held nothing but a few bushes, some palm trees, and the adumbration of sacred grounds. As I drifted past Memorial Amílcar Cabral the sepia-toned filter resumed. I glided through the Estádio da Várzea, and up the hill to Rua C Saude, where I began winding through the streets aimlessly, unable to control where I was going, not knowing what I was looking for, or where I was headed—or if I was even looking for anyone or headed anywhere at all. Along the way I saw many people out and about their nightly business, and many of them were surrounded by or being followed by other individuals whom they could not see, who seemed to be of a grayish tone and who were

phasing in and out of space. There was one among them who seemed to truly by about his malevolent and crafty business, with an aura of affluence amidst the others; wealthy in the success-rate in the trappings of evil, souls ensnared; yet masquerading as an elite, for he was tattered, sullen, and empty in his appearance, with infinite, hollow emptiness in his eyes—a bleak, cold and dreary emptiness I will not soon forget.

I found that I was passing by the grounds of the polytechnic high school as the color again restored to a normal quality. I floated through a plaza and past the bank, all the while still seeing real people being stalked by entities phasing out behind them—chasing their nightly business as well; with the presence of the greatest of them felt even from afar.

I crossed in front of the bank before floating across the street toward a Latter-day Saint meetinghouse. As I arrived on the East side of the building I beheld myself that I was standing idle on the curb, with another tall, white elder standing on the sidewalk just a few more feet ahead. As I came upon myself it's as if I knew I should assume the position—enter my own body, and so I did. As soon as I was there the color turned on and the scene pressed play. Just then a taxi cab pulled up and out came two missionaries who were natives to the islands. The cab pulled away, I was informed we were assigned to do “splits,” and the new missionaries introduced themselves, offering their hands for a shake, and thus a confirmation of companionship in the Lord.

Next thing I knew I found myself standing in a small apartment holding my scriptures, standing next to a desk by the window. The other three elders were on the other side of the apartment, which was essentially one big room, but they appeared to be in a dining area. They seemed to be discussing something I couldn't understand, while I seemed to be gathering things to pack up and leave with my new temporary missionary companion. I suddenly grew uneasy, as I looked to my right and watched that darkest of figures from the streets walk through the closed door and into the apartment. I tried to say something, but my voice was paralyzed. He began to walk in circles around the other three elders, as if devising his next move to ensnare or hurt them. No matter what sort of energy or will I tried to call upon I was unable to speak or move. The motion of the scene and the speed of the encircling of the devil began to hasten, and my fear for the safety of the elders increased exponentially. Just as it appeared as if Lucifer was about to lunge towards them, I ripped myself from my paralysis, raising my right arm as if to stop him in the midst of his attack, but a blinding white light emanated from my hand, instantaneously filling the entire space as the darkness fled. The light slowly dissipated, and I woke up, paralyzed in my MTC bed, feeling incredible amounts of sharp, stabbing pains all throughout my body. I'm not sure how long I laid there, but I eventually rolled out of bed with a loud thud, becoming the alarm for the other elders in the room, only minutes before we were to be up for the morning anyway.

We got ready, and headed out the door to breakfast. I rounded the corner to the stairwell directly next to our dorm door, and saw a plaque with a picture of Jesus Christ, and a scripture that read,

Therefore, hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up—

— 3 Nephi 18.24

Fast forward to early December. I have been in Cape Verde for a couple of weeks, and on this morning, the morning of the 6th, I was on my walk over to the chapel with Elder Badesso to meet for Zone Conference. Our area Seventy, Elder Kopischke, was set to speak to us this morning. I had the pleasure of meeting Elder Kopischke before the meeting. He shook my hand joyfully and firmly, grabbed me by the shoulder and said with a jovial tone, “Ah, Elder Shenefelt! Do you know what your name means?” “No, sir, I do not,” I sheepishly replied. “Shenefelt—The Beautiful Fields of White. Strong German name.”

He gave an invigorating speech, and testified that should we maintain diligence in our work, in ten years time the islands and its people would receive a temple. The meeting ended, and we went about the streets on our missionary business. We had several appointments that day; out to see our musician friend Etienne Montrond, over to see Esther—a younger woman who honestly only liked to listen to us sing hymns—and then back near the beach to visit Atanásio and several others scattered in between, but soon enough the day was drawing to an end, so we started our long walk back to the apartment. As per usual, I was incredibly tired, and in an excessive amount of pain and discomfort in various forms throughout my body, so I was looking forward to reunion with my plank of wood bed and another two hours of sleep.

The waxing crescent moon—Senhora Lua Nova—hung high in the sky. This, a sign to the local farmers and fisherman, (and a symbol for others), that the darkest nights were ending, and brighter nights were soon to come. It helped light our way back home, as the streets and alleyways were otherwise very dark or dimly lit at this time—though it was only able to provide a portion of its glow, as it was slightly veiled from the haze of the winds of Bruma Seca, a storm period where winds carry sands from the Sahara Desert across the ocean and into the Cape Verde Islands.

As was fairly typical, many locals were out and about, visiting the markets, drinking, smoking, socializing, watching Smallville on the porch, wandering around aimlessly by themselves, muttering to themselves, yelling at no one, sometimes threatening or taunting us; with a friendly voice once in awhile yelling out, “Bo noti, Elders!” We reached the heart of town, passing the high school, and crossing through the bank plaza before arriving at the church. Elder Badesso was glancing around as if expecting someone, but we were the only ones there. He stopped walking, pulled out his phone and began dialing a number. The apartment was just around the corner, and we didn’t have anything else on our schedule that I knew of, so I asked him why we had stopped—my bed was so close. Right then a taxi cab pulled up and he informed me that tonight I would be going on splits to Simão Ribeiro for a couple days with another Elder. Two Elders who were native to Cape Verde exited the cab and joined us on the side of the road. We all introduced ourselves, shook hands, and began heading back to the apartment.

By this point I had already begun to panic internally. For as soon as Badesso had said the word “splits” with a cab pulling up beside me, I recognized where I was, but was completely speechless as to how I was there—awake in Africa and not asleep in Utah. The other Elders were all chatting in creole I couldn’t hardly understand yet, and so it was easy for me to take a moment, the briefest of moments, to even begin to try to process what was happening—though not even just what was happening, but what

may likely be just about to happen. I remembered where this night had ended: me, paralyzed, watching the devil plot an attack against the three other gentleman in the apartment who were walking by my side this very moment; me rebuking him in the name of the Lord, Jesus Christ; and me, in excruciating pain—but in Utah. I didn't know what actually being present may hold. I wasn't sure it was something that was actually going to happen, I was internally petrified at the thought that it might. I began thinking to myself, "please do not let this come to pass, please do not let this come to pass," but as we rounded the corner toward the apartment, a strong wind came through the street corridor, and in that unspeakable manner, I thought to myself, (felt through the calming sensations of the wind and the release of a deep breath), that if it need pass, it must, and I have already performed the act already—not my will, but thine be done. Needless to say, my anxiety was still heightened, and I was on edge.

I soon found myself standing next to my desk with a bag, gathering the last of my items to go. I grabbed a pocket translation dictionary and my scriptures, and looked up to see the other three Elders standing across the way on the other side of the large room having their discussion. I knew that this was the moment I had anticipated since hearing the word "splits." I knew that potentially any second now that something unexpected might happen, that perhaps the spirit of the darkness may enter the very room we occupy—but he didn't. I stood there glancing back and forth from the door to the Elders until too much time had passed, they had moved on from their discussion in that area of the apartment, and had joined me near our study desks and the front door, ready for me and my new split-companion to head out and take a cab inland to Simão Ribeiro.

That night I had dreams of a specific quality that I wouldn't experience again for another fourteen years, not until I tried the combination of taking DMT at the height of an LSD trip that is. The content differs, but the visual aspects and felt-presence are the same. In this restless yet energized dream I saw sharp bursts and flashes of light which illuminated the silhouettes of many entities scattered throughout the islands. The angle at which they could be seen would change with every new burst of light. It was as if I was watching some sort of flashbulb movie sequence in golds, blues and grays, seeing dark wisps of people scurrying through the streets towards the beaches. I was sent and set above the islands looking down, and I witnessed the shadows of beings exiting the islands, wandering off into the vastness and the depths of the ocean.

My health was not improving, and had been slowly going downhill since that first night in the MTC. The rugged, volcanic terrain and poorly maintained cobblestone streets of Cape Verde were not playing very nice to my pre-existent, unmanaged chronic pain, and the local nurse just wasn't sure what to do either. The mission president had wondered if reassignment to another Portuguese speaking mission was an option, somewhere where the missionaries had cars or better transportation, or maybe the church offices, service mission—something less physically taxing. I waited to hear back for a couple more weeks. Word came back from the First Presidency that no other Portuguese speaking missions at the time would have faired my body any better, they were all walking-only missions, and most of them also had rough

terrains. Reassignment wasn't their answer, but instead the answer was to release and send me home. Mission accomplished.

So on December 22, I was taken to the Cape Verde airport, and was left their alone to wait for my flight back to the United States. When I returned, I was released by my stake president. I offered, and we discussed the potential for me to continue locally with service mission work; and we would talk about it again a few more times, but nothing ever came of it. I was encouraged to attend the temple, and to continue on with my life and schooling. So I did just that. However, upon my return, I didn't just magically get better. The next half a year was still incredibly painful and exhausting, and I was becoming increasingly emotionally distressed due to the incomprehensible nature of what I had experienced on my mission—dreaming a dream and then walking in that dream in waking life just weeks later. It wasn't until June 19, 2009 that I would finally crack and try to explain to my parents what exactly I had experienced and why I was behaving the way I was at the time. My grandfather came over to the house to give me a blessing. In it he blessed me with health and strength and commanded my body to get better. He paused for a moment and said that a dark entity had clung to my body, and commanded it—in the name of Jesus Christ—to leave. The recovery was not immediate, but over the next couple of weeks there was a release of tension, and pain, I began to have more energy, and my mind began to clear. However, that clearing was accompanied by a brand new phenomena. On June 23 I woke up to the sounds of an orchestra playing and a chorus singing heavenly songs, but it wasn't coming from any stereo system, it was coming from all around me. This not only continued to happen throughout my day—sometimes loudly, though most of the time gently and in the background—and continued to happen for the next seven years. A rare phenomena I wouldn't discover a term for until 2022, called Musicophilia.<sup>2</sup>

As the years passed, I thought of this experience often, playing it over and over in my mind, perplexed at what had taken place, what it meant, why it had hurt so much, and so on. But there was one aspect, one singular conversation had on my mission that I never bothered to recall, because it was likely back there categorized with seemingly insignificant moments. But on March 5, 2025, as I sat in my office holding my newly reconfigured Flipper Zero, considering what sort of system I may want to practice controlling with it, I was smacked in my minds eye, and my office became the Cape Verde airport.

I was sitting there staring out the windows watching crews get the planes ready, looking at the flight board, and watching all the other people passing by. There was a gentleman standing nearby, he was holding some medium-sized device in his hand, and it had antennas attached to the top. After a few minutes passed this man approached me. He appeared to be a native to the island, but he spoke to me in English instead of Creole or Portuguese. He said that he wanted to show me something, saying that he knew about the Elders of the church and that he could trust me with his secret. He began fiddling with his device, told me to watch the flight board, and as I looked over it sort of glitched out, flickered, and blurred like it had an error, but then reloaded and looked like it was operating normally again—only, all the flight data had been changed. The screen flickered in and out a few times, and pretty quickly someone began

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<sup>2</sup> Sacks, Oliver. "A Bolt from the Blue." *The New Yorker*, 16 July 2007, [www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/07/23/a-bolt-from-the-blue](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/07/23/a-bolt-from-the-blue)

speaking in a rushed tone over the PA system. But this man appeared to make a few adjustments on his device, causing the PA system to go static, and be overtaken by radio music. The airport crew was visibly stressed, shouting back and forth at one another trying to figure out what was happening. The man looked at me and smiled, very pleased with himself, and said, “They may think they’re in control, but I am the one in control.” He looked at his device, made some more adjustments, and the airport resumed its normal operations. He smiled at me again, turned around and walked out of the airport.

I didn’t know then, but knew for a certainty as I returned to my office chair holding my own hacking device, that I had once again come face to face with the prince of darkness, who was anxiously using any and all means to gain and maintain control of any part of this kingdom he could possibly grasp, knowing that I had recently done him a great disservice in releasing and banishing his metaphysical clutch—his control of the heart of the islands, and God’s kingdom on earth.

In the October 7, 2018 General Conference, Prophet Russel M. Nelson announced the Praia, Cape Verde temple, ten years after Elder Kopischke’s speech that included this prophetic word.

Since 2008 the presence of the LDS church all throughout Africa has been resilient and expansive, shifting beyond the pioneering regions of West Africa to reach the children of God further inland and to the East. From 2008-2025 growth is double what it had been since 1988, (when the Cape Verde mission opened), and it doubled in fewer years than it previously had. If Portugal was the lighthouse for the church to Europe, Cape Verde was the lighthouse of the church for Africa. And now as I type this now, I wonder which Elder underwent this experience all those years ago in order to cleanse the land of Portugal, rooting the Light of Christ deep in its soil, and shining forth, spreading throughout the continent...