

# Joseph's Novitiate

By Stephen Muratore

During his three-month Order novitiate, Joseph Morandi was assigned to the laundry obedience. The Order called a task, whether pleasant or unpleasant, given for one's own spiritual growth an "obedience."

Joseph's obedience was to launder the clothing, the bathroom towels, and the kitchen towels used by everyone in the Boston novitiate center. Joseph's Novice Master made it clear that any time Joseph spent thinking about philosophy or the electronic arts while performing this obedience was time Joseph stole from his own spiritual development.

After a few days of the laundry obedience, the skin from Joseph's fingertips to his elbows blossomed scarlet. The skin ruptured, and bled. After this, every time Joseph's hands touched laundry detergent, his body traced the neural pathways from hands to brain with hot razors. When Joseph pressed shirts with an iron, his raw fingertips curled from the iron's heat.

After three weeks of this obedience, Joseph presented his hands and arms to his Novice Master, offering the thought that his skin might be reacting to the laundry detergent. "That's not how it works. Your arms are manifesting a cleansing. Have you ever done any drugs?"

Joseph admitted he had smoked marijuana.

"That's it. The Light moving through you now is cleansing your body of the drug toxins. In your case, the toxins are being pushed out through your hands and arms. Have you been thinking about the stuff you did before you came here, like the stuff you did in New York?"

Joseph replied, "Do you mean the video-art things? When I start thinking about them, I push them away, but sometimes, when my hands and arms bleed, it's hard not to think about art."

"Thoughts, too, can be toxins," said the Novice Master.

The Novice Master added a spiritual discipline to Joseph's list of nightly spiritual disciplines. "Fill a stainless steel pan with warm water every evening. Add baking soda. Soak your hands and arms in the water, making sure your skin touches the metal of the pan--to create a current. Mentally fill your arms with the Light as you do this."

After a few days of this steel-pan spiritual discipline, Joseph's hands swelled like balloons, and the edges of his sores turned green.

In about a week, the Novice Master gave Joseph a new obedience: yard work. Slowly, the open sores healed. Joseph felt that working in the open air had completed his cleansing. He performed his obediences, practiced his disciplines, and seldom thought about art or philosophy.