

# How a Zen Buddhist Monk and Hospital Chaplain Spends His Sundays

To care for Covid-19 patients and their families, Seigan Ed Glassing reserves one day of the week to care for himself.

**By Ted Alcorn**

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Even for someone accustomed to facing death, like Seigan Ed Glassing, who serves on the palliative care team at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital, 2020 was a brutal year.

Ordained as a monk at Dai Bosatsu Zendo, a monastery in the Catskills, Mr. Glassing also studied in Japan and helped direct a temple in New York City, where he met his husband, Andrew Lagomarsino. But restless with a life that felt cloistered, he found reconnection as an interfaith chaplain. Now he ministers to the grieving and dying “of all faiths, no faiths, and everything in between.”

The tables turned on him in late February when his husband fell ill and began losing weight. The couple worried that Andrew had Covid-19 but upon finally seeking care, they learned he had leukemia. His health deteriorated quickly, and he died in April. For several weeks his body lay alongside casualties of the pandemic in a refrigerated truck outside the hospital.

Mr. Glassing, 55, who is still absorbing the loss, feels a deep connection to the many who suffered so much this past year. In his one-bedroom apartment at the northern tip of Manhattan, where he lives with a cat named Momo, he devotes Sundays to self-care.

“There is no other way except to walk into that landscape of sadness, and loss, and grief, and to be an ally to yourself.”

**CAT, COFFEE** Between 5 and 6 in the morning Momo will wake me up. He will start putting his nose on my eyelids. If that doesn't work, he'll pounce on me or walk all over my body. So I let him do that for about 10-15 minutes, and then I do wake up. I feed him and then I make some coffee for myself.

**ALTAR** I have a seasonal affective disorder light, and I sit underneath that for a half-hour and I do my practice. I have an altar table, and I put the light next to me and I light a stick of incense. I put water offerings in seven bowls. And then I sit and do my chanting, and then I meditate.



Morning is a time for meditation — but coffee comes first. Ilana Storage



**CHURCH** I have a banana shake in the morning — after the meditation, because if I eat before that, I fall asleep. Not good to meditate on a full stomach. Then at 7, I listen to On Being with Krista Tippett. She used to be a chaplain. I love her way of talking and the absolute wisdom of these folks that she’s got on. It’s my church, so to speak.

**TRAINING** From 8 until 9, I play with Momo. We trained him to give paw and to spin around and to stand up on his two hind legs. And now, although he’s a very stubborn cat, he’s working on the two-card monte trick. I put two cups, I put a little treat under the cup, move the cup around, and he’s got to choose which one the treat is underneath. He should be on YouTube.



Working on tricks with Momo. “He should be on YouTube.” Ilana Storage

**SACRED PAINTING** Then I’ll start doing my Tibetan thangka painting. It’s sacred artwork — it’s not just portraying an image. You are evoking through prayers and meditation, so the energy is actually imbued in this work of art. One painting can take a

couple of months. The very last thing that you paint on that Buddha is the eyes. And when you paint the eyes, through a special ceremony, they open: It's alive. It's meditative painting, so I can lose myself for those three or four hours.



“The very last thing that you paint on that Buddha is the eyes. And when you paint the eyes, through a special ceremony, they open: It's alive.” Ilana Storace

**FIGURE DRAWING** At 2, I have a figure drawing class. It's a Zoom. I started in April, right after Andrew died. Seeing a beautiful human being, and to paint them or to draw them, it's very intimate. And it's LGBTQ-based. So, these are my tribe, these are my people.





“Seeing a beautiful human being, and to paint them or to draw them, it’s very intimate.” Ilana Storace



**NARNIA** Then I usually go out for a walk in Inwood Hill Park. What I love most is there are, mysteriously, these turn-of-the-century gas lights that have been abandoned. The whole place looks like Narnia! Andrew and I used to walk in this park all the time together, so for me it's like I'm walking with his ghost.



On Inwood Hill Park: “The whole place looks like Narnia!” Karsten Moran for The New York Times

**TV DINNER** Around 6 I'll start to make dinner. I'm a vegetarian. I will do vegetables and some kind of lentil pasta. I love Japanese pumpkins and cauliflower. Oh my God, roasted brussels sprouts. But I always combine it with tofu or tempeh or some of those fake sausages. I will put on a “Queer Eye,” usually, and I'll watch as I eat.

**CHECK-IN** I have Habitica — it's a gaming, get-things-done app. It helps me drink more water, sit down and meditate, all the things I ask myself to do every single day. Did I say thank you to someone? Did I receive thanks from someone and not push it away? Did I receive and give a compliment to someone? Put it on there! Do it! So, I take my vitamins and check off my Habitica stuff.

**CLOSE THE DAY** I fill up my aromatherapy dispenser; I use spruce and cinnamon bark. Then I close my altar down, which means I pour my offering bowls of water into a jar, and I put it into my plants. And I close the day with a chant for the night deity to watch over me and my loved ones. I usually say good night to Andrew. Then I get into bed and Momo comes in and snuggles and I shut the light out and we go to bed together.

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