

# Where Am I?

*Myong Hae Sunim*

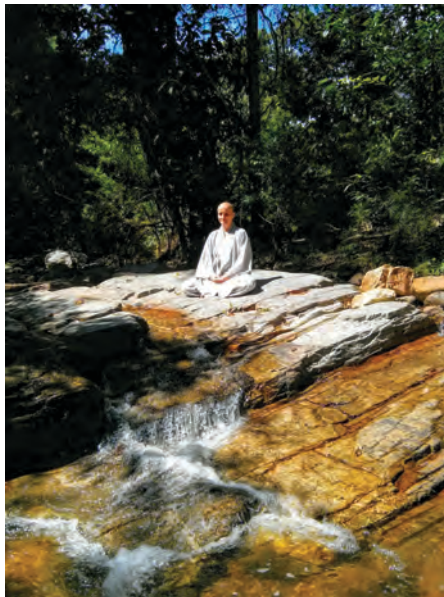
I started practicing Zen with the Kwan Um School in Lithuania in 1991. My practice there quickly pointed me in the direction of ordaining as a monastic. I traveled to Korea, ordained and soon went to Hong Kong to train with Zen Master Dae Kwan. I have been a nun now for 19 years under the guidance of Zen Master Dae Kwan, or “Sifu” as we all lovingly call her.

This last year I had the opportunity to experience our Kwan Um School in a special way. It started with me joining the three-month winter Kyol Che retreat at Providence Zen Center and then part of summer Kyol Che in Europe. At Providence, we had a different teacher nearly every week, and in Europe, summer Kyol Che took place in different countries, including the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Slovakia and Poland. It was a fantastic opportunity to meet and practice with different sanghas from our international school. Our style of practice in the Kwan Um School is the same around the world, but there are small adjustments from sangha to sangha. I experienced don’t-know mind continuously while adjusting to these small differences. This was so valuable because it brought back a beginner’s mind over and over again. At the same time that I was experiencing the differences, I also experienced the sameness within our school, and this was a wonderful and warm feeling. You are at home in every place!

One interesting lesson for me was chanting the Heart Sutra in so many different languages. This was great! Usually we memorize the Heart Sutra in one language and then sometimes go on automatic when we chant it. Our mouths chant it but our minds think right along with no hindrance. This is not possible when trying to chant in a different language. Every word is completely new. Also, even though we all chant the Great Dharani in Korean, the melody would change ever so slightly from group to group, sangha to sangha and country to country. I found

myself asking “Where am I? Where are we in the chant?” So again and again—back to don’t-know mind!

This was the first time that I met and practiced with so many different teachers as I traveled from Asia to the United States and to Europe. Each teacher had a different way of presenting Zen Master Seung Sahn’s teachings. Each teacher has his or her own character and life experience, creating new and lively exchange in interviews. I often laughed as much as I learned. I felt their care and their sincere wish for each of us to grow.



*Photo: Teannie Yeung*

At first I experienced frustration with the different approaches that teachers took. Sifu, however, taught me not to attach to a “standard” answer, but rather to connect with the teacher in front of me. This meant perceiving what is happening in each moment of the interview. It was a treasure to learn different perspectives from each teacher. It is the same in our lives; there is no one formula that fits every situation. This was of great value to me and helped me to be clear in every moment, rather than depending on past experience. I completely enjoyed the process itself!

But just as wonderful and helpful as it has been to meet with so many teachers in our school, for me it has been profoundly important to have one primary teacher with whom I could deepen my practice and who guided me through thick and thin. Meeting with my primary teacher regularly meant she could point out hidden habits and show me what was sometimes so difficult for me to see clearly about myself. It was Sifu who sent me out at this point in my life to expand and to experience. I am very grateful to her.

I encourage everyone to take advantage of the unique situation in our school. You don’t need to look for other schools. Your practice can benefit greatly by meeting the many teachers and trying out the slightly different styles in the international Kwan Um School. ♦