

[The Sai Movement in Malaysia](#)

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Mr. Jagathesan, President of Sathya Sai Central Council of Malaysia, provided special insights for the NSW in a rare, 3-hour interview with N. Thiruvagasam on Jan. 16 in Kuala Lumpur. The following are excerpts from the session.

The New Saivite World: Mr. Jagathesan How did you become a devotee of Sai Baba?

Mr. Jagathesan: In 1976 I first encountered Sai Baba. I was born a Hindu, but knew little and cared less...

By age 21 I had a government position, by age 30 I had gone around the world several times as Director of Industrial Promotion of Malaysia's Industrial Development Authority. I was a common figure in the dining places and night clubs of Kuala Lumpur. My life was full. I had no need for God...

At this stage of my life I heard about Sai Baba. At once I had nothing but utter contempt for him. As far as I was concerned he was a magician trying to fool people. But I didn't say he was a bad man. He was just trying to bring these weak-minded people who needed religion to the path of religion by using all these tricks and magic. But for me-strong will and strong mind-I did not need God...

Around June 8, 1976, I ended up in an argument about Sai Baba in my auntie's house. I was attacking him...viciously. At about 10:30 the argument began to subside and arising out of certain statements made I mentally challenged Baba, "If you are what you claim you are, prove it!" At that time I was confronted with the most startling thing in my life. Holy ash appeared on his photograph...

All my 34 years of scientific, rational thinking that everything could be answered by science was in a micro-second thrown out. My entire life, the base of my life, was removed and I was put into a mental-spiritual turmoil.

That night I came back home and my mother, though not a devotee of Baba, had his picture on her altar...At 12 midnight, I asked the picture loudly, "Who are you? What are you, man or God?" The first song about God came out. I am not a musician or learned in Tamil, but since that day 450 odd God songs have come, Hindu songs on all the forms in the world, songs on Baba, songs in English, song on Murugan, songs on Siva.

Q: How did the movement being in Malaysia?

A: There was no formal request. Devotees just began to appear..., then about 8-9 years ago people were afraid to show Baba's picture outside their home, because they would be considered a deviant form religion. But then Swami had his own way. He began to manifest holy ash and honey from photographs, and this began to move people to realize that this was something beyond the normal, that there was a supernatural phenomenon here.

They began to turn towards Sai, to read and understand him. One of the things he asked devotees to do was to follow the religion of their choice and be much stronger in that religion. One of the disciplines of this religious practice is "Nagasankirtan" singing of God's name, whichever form of God you respect, so the Sai Baba devotees in their homes got together and started having informal bhajans. The houses became too small, and they spilled over into halls. Then centers started service activities, so registered themselves under the Societies Act...Today the Council has registered 35 centers...

There are three aspects: 1.) personal sadhana, 2.) family sadhana and 3.) community sadhana. There are active members, associate members and devotees. Active members must be prepared to undertake 4 hours of service every week, called Divine Mission work. This does not mean spreading Baba's name. It is helping to feed the roots of religion. If we can help Hindus be better Hindus, help an old folk's home or orphanage or leper settlement, human values classes for children-these are all part of the community service program. To qualify as an

active member means only the privilege to work, and that work you do in the name of Divinity...In Malaysia there is no record, but there are hundreds of thousands of devotees. Many just have Baba's picture.

Q: Some staunch, orthodox Hindus believe Sai Baba is deviating from the traditional teachings, while others take it to be part of Hinduism. There is no specific Hindu path which he has taught. What do you think of this?

A: I think they are right in one way. Baba is not a religious leader for Hinduism. He is a spiritual leader. He says follow the religion of your choice. Thousands of Christians from Italy and Europe are flocking into Puttaparthi; thousands of Hindus, Moslems, Sikhs. Swami has built a mosque beside a mosque beside Puttaparthi, In fact,...he teaches all to respect the other religions...

It is not a deviation. Today I consider myself a Hindu following my religion-respecting, loving, understanding and following my religion. And the person who made me do this is Baba.