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That Russia Yoga Lecturer Is on Trial Thanks to a Christian Activist Whose Wife Left Him to Join a Sect

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Dmitry Ugai, the man in St. Petersburg now on trial for illegal missionary work because he lectured about the spiritual roots of yoga, owes his current legal troubles to a Russian Orthodox activist who says his wife left him to join a cult.

Ugai told the website Meduza that a man named Nail Nasibulin is the one who filed a complaint against him. Ugai's trial began on Monday, and after several hours of proceedings, the case was postponed until Jan. 18.

"If I'm convicted, then it's clear that the mere act of speaking publicly will be enough to find a person guilty, and they'll be able to prosecute anyone just for practicing yoga," Ugai told Meduza, saying that Nasibulin didn't even attend the lecture in question.

"His whole justification [for pressing charges] is my religious faith," said Ugai, a Hinduist.

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Speaking to Meduza, Nasibulin described Ugai as a "missionary monk" from the Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math Cultural Center in St. Petersburg, saying he "recruits young people into the ranks of this pseudo-Hindu organization" under the guise of "cultural events."

In April 2016, Nasibulin told the television station "Mir 24" that his wife and sister left his home to join a sect, taking his four-year-old son with them. "The adherents live by strict rules, unquestioningly obeying the advice of the guru. They don't take antibiotics and they don't get vaccinations," he told Mir 24.

According to the website Mediazona, Nasibulin is himself a religious activist, and apparently belongs to "Stavros," a regional Orthodox missionary social movement.

Ugai maintains that his lecture on yoga's spiritual foundations was purely "popular science," without any missionary content, he says.

The trial was postponed when the senior lieutenant who supposedly drew up the police report announced in court that he didn't recognize his own signature on the document. The trial will resume on Jan. 18.

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