

## HINDU TEMPLE (VIRTUAL VISIT)

Site: The Hindu Temple Society of North America/Sri Maha Vallabha Ganapati Devasthanam

Location: 45-47 Browne Street, Flushing, NY 11355

Date: June 11, 2021

Time: 8:30 am

email address: [hts@nyganestemple.org](mailto:hts@nyganestemple.org)

Temple Priests:

S. Hariharan

S. Sivakumar

Ramanuyan Ponnuswamy

Govindaraja Bhatler

Santosh Kumar Kashna

Vivekanonda G. Balasubramani

Suresh Somasundaran

Praveen Singha Joshi

Sivan Chiklaswamy

Observance: Prayers/Sri Siva Abhishehan

During my virtual visit to the Hindu Temple Society of North America, I observed a prayer service. I look forward to one day visiting the temple in person. The exterior design of the temple is elaborate gray structure. The temple is designed in accordance with Agama Sastras (scriptures relating to the temple building). I was impressed with the fact that have their temple guidelines posted. This is very important. Visitors must understand and the respect the protocol established in a religious worship experience. They had adherence to Covid-19 regulations and restrictions as per CDC. The website states the temple is preparing guidelines for reopening for Darshan and Archana only for devotees only. The religious services that can be performed are Archana to Sri Maha Vallabha Ganapati, Sri Siva, Sri Pavati, Sri Shanmukha and Valli,

Devasena, Sri Venkateswara, Sri Maha Lakshmi or Sri Hanuman. Pooja is performed Monday to Friday 4 to 6 pm; Saturdays and Sundays from 4 to 6 pm. The live streaming prayer (Sri Hanuman Abhisheham) began at 8:30 am. The prayer service appears on Hindu Temple's weekly event calendar. The following services are available virtually: Punyachachanam (sanctification); Namakaranam (naming Ceremony); Vidyarambam (Education); Satyanarayana Pooja (Wisdom); Amavasya Tarpanam (Monthly); Straddham (Annual); Straddham (Masikam)- Post funeral rites. I was very impressed with the Akshayam (Hindu Young Professionals). They are 18 to 35 years old. They are interested in building a legacy for future generations. It offers diverse perspectives in a traditional Hindu Temple setting. They address intergenerational issues. They hold annual conferences and learning series. Devotees can book the virtual services. The length of the prayer service was approximately one hour. The website has a list of figurines which are used at The Hindu Temple of North America to represent a personal God. The Hindu Priest chanted the Agama Sastras (ancient Hindu scriptures) during the prayer service. The Hindu Priest used a figure representing a personal God during the prayer service. The Hindu Priest The darshan was Sri Maha Vallabha Ganapati Devasthanam. The priest in the live streaming virtual was shirtless. He was adorned in white loose-fitting pants and appeared to have a white cloth wrapped around his waist. He used a male darshan during the service known as the Sri Siva Abhishekan. The darshan was enclosed in a golden arch shaped background. The pooja tray objects used were a 1) bell; 2) bronze pot of water The Hindu priest also used what appeared to be a banana and smeared it on the forehead of the darshan which represents a personal god. During the prayer ceremony, the Hindu priest poured the holy water on the darshan. Then he poured a creamy white substance. Next, he poured what appeared to be an orange substance. Then use the incense urn which had fire sprouting out. The Hindu priest also used yellow pasty

substance which was smeared on the figurine and then eventually washed off with the water. The ceremonial function regarding the prayers was synchronized with the chanting of the prayers. The Hindu priest appeared to be dressing and purifying the figurine which represents a personal God.

The Hindu priest performing the rituals used non-verbal gestures and stood attentively coordinating each of his actions with the prayers. In my observance, the ceremony was synonymous with the liturgical style of some Christian denominations (Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Eastern Orthodox). The ritual of being cleansed is demonstrated. The chanting of the prayers reminded me of the why some Christian catholic and protestant denominations chant prayers. The use of the incense urn reminded me of the purifying ritual using incense during a Roman Catholic service. I observed both similarities and differences to Christianity during the Hindu prayer service. Initially, the liturgical style of service was unfamiliar to me. However, eventually, I was able to follow the service. I watched attentively as the priest meticulously dressed, adorned, sanctified, and purified the figurine representing a personal God. I observed that the Hindu prayer service appears such as ritualistic as a prayer service in any world religion. I observed how important it is any religion to follow protocol for worship and observance. I also acknowledged that ceremonial rites are important in all faiths and religious traditions. I also learned from observing the prayer service how the Hindu terms I learned in Farhadian's book helped me understand what I was observing during the prayer ritual and celebration. I wonderful to experience another religious tradition. It was a rewarding and enriching experience. The temple is referred to as a "Hindu Cultural Center." Life appears to be centered in the Hindu Temple for devout Hindus as it is in the Christian church for devout Christians.

- The Hindu Temple Society of North America was originally incorporated as Sri Pandrimalaisnamigal on January 26, 1970. It relocated to the present location in 1977. It was previously a Russian Orthodox Church. The temple was consecrated on July 4, 1977. Sri La Sri Padrmalal Swamigal who was from Madras, India was the first Hindu Pundit (Priest) The Hindu Temple not only engages in religious ceremonial rites, but also appears to engage its temple participants holistically. There is an after-school program which has academic enrichment in mathematics and science. There are summer camp referrals and information. This reminded me of some of the Christian camps that exist. Their summer camp registration has begun. They have 5 day online sessions. The topic of discussion will be ‘Saints of India’ and “Bhagavad Gita.” There is a Dance of Music program called Venkateswara Mahotsavam. They have Father’s Day observance on June 20, 2021 and recognition of International Yoga Day on June 20, 2021. There is a learning series called Akshayam. There is a wedding hall (love the emphasis on the importance of marriage). There is a temple canteen with delicious Indian foods such as idli, vada, dosa. They have arts and culture. They have a senior center which has activities such as yoga and Debate teams. There are many volunteers who help run various programs at the temple.

Upon observing the temple service, I noted similarities that coexist in other faith traditions. For example, the Hindu Temple was built with regard to specifications according to Hindu scriptures. This is also prevalent in the Judeo/Christian experience. The tabernacle in the Old Testament was built according to specifications given in Exodus and Deuteronomy. In addition, the incense urn is also prevalent in Judeo/Christian tradition. It is used in Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, and Eastern orthodox faith traditions. It is used as a source of cleansing. Next, using rituals and administering blessings is a shared faith experience. The Hindu priest performed

rituals through the use of a personal deity (darshan). Other similarities involve the functioning of the various priests assigned to specific Pooja services. It is similar to Christian faith traditions assigning roles to various clergy. It was also interesting to observe how devotees make temple worship and activities a central part of their daily and weekly lives. Many churches are the center of activity and life for Christians. It was interesting to see the faith similarities and differences. Through the virtual experience, L learned that each faith tradition has sacred practices. It is a great idea to understand the belief of another faith in order to promote understanding and religious tolerance. In my ministerial praxis, encourage learning about other faith traditions, In a twenty-first century context, we need to share our religious experiences to better understand how we can promote evangelism throughout the world.