The division between the ideal and the real has always posed a dilemma for any thinking contemplative human. On the one hand there exists this perfect state of affairs envisioned in mind, and at the other end of the pole, the nitty-gritty, the mundane existence of day to day life. Artiste have long attempted to “bridge that gap” by creating “a beauty which did not yet exist”, bringing into the concrete reality (apparent) of the senses this other-worldly loveliness. Musicians, sculptors, painters, poets, writers, dancers and actors have all tried to make “the ideal real” and accessible through human sensory perceptions.

But when the curtain falls, when one closes the last page of that much loved book, when one leaves the museum, when the lights go off; one is brought back to earth with a thud.

The Rishis discovered that the ideal can be made real in a more permanent manner through various ritualistic practices. The sacredness which illumines the mundane can be invoked and placed into a proper framework through many ritualistic practices.

In the Hindu life style these rituals are many and infuse the daily reality with the brilliant light of the ideal. Some simple daily rituals which serve this purpose are the lighting of the oil lamp morning and evening, giving a soft glow of comfort at the important transitions of the day. Various Mantra and ritualistic gestures are used to salute the rising sun. Kholams, geometric Yantric formations, are drawn at the threshold of the house, creating an ethereal sense of wonder in all those who enter. The flame is waved before the idols (ideals) enshrined within the household’s Puja Room. A portion of food is offered to crows and other animals before partaking of the meal. Incense is burned before the family shrine. Various Mantras and chanted appropriate to the time of day.

This is only to describe a few of the ritualistic acts which give order, dignity and meaning to the mundane aspects of daily life. In the larger cycles of time, more elaborate rituals make the “rites of passage” – birth, naming ceremony, taking of the first solid food, ear-boring ceremony, attainment of puberty, marriage and death – all are placed into an “ideal” framework which illumines the importance and significance of the moment with ritualistic words, thought and deeds.

Reverence for the Guru is also expressed through significant rituals which try to capture the glorious beauty of the Guru’s presence. The ideal manifests and becomes real through rituals, especially if the ritual is grounded in valid archetypal symbols which serve as bridge between the unconsciousness of Samskara and of the consciousness of in-the-moment, aware Yogic living.