On the occasion of Shri Narasimha Jayanti, I would like to present a short but sweet composition of Shankara in honor of (his family-deity according to some) Lakshmi-Narasimha. This hymn consists of only five verses and, as its name indicates, is truly a collection of five gems of verses.

These verses are addressed to the mind whose very nature is to wander from one matter to another seeking enjoyment just a bee wanders from one flower to another attempting to collect nectar. The hymn asks the mind to stop going after mundane matters and turn itself towards God. Then, the mind-bee can taste the nectar of bhakti instead of roaming about in the desert of mundane matters without ever tasting real nectar.

If you desire to please your lord, the jIva, then worship Shri Narasimha constantly. Decorating the reflected object causes the decoration of the reflection. O mind-bee! Why do you roam about without purpose in the desert of joyless mundane matters? Worship (taste) the pure nectar of the lotus feet of Lakshmi-Narasimha!

Notes:

This first verse of the laxmiNarasimha-PaJNcharatnam.h asks the mind, whose tendency is to wander from one subject to another, to constantly dwell on God.

The reflection theory of advaita holds that the jivas or individual souls are reflections of Brahman. Just as the sun may be reflected in many bodies or water, or a face
reflected in many mirrors, Brahman is reflected in many "subtle bodies" (liN^ga-sharIra's) to form jIva's.

If a face is being reflected in a mirror, any decoration applied to the face itself would apply to the reflection. In other words, by pleasing God, the jIva would be automatically pleased.

Shankara deals with the reflection theory in his commentary on the third chapter of the Brahma-sUtras. An objection is sometimes raised as how the Brahman which is without form, color, or parts, is able to be reflected. As Shankara replies, and also as MadhusUdana SarasvatI replies in his siddhAnta-bindu, it is not necessary for a reflected object to be always with form, color, etc. It may be required for a visual image but not so for others, such as sound which may be reflected from a surface to produce an echo.

AbhAsa eva cha (an appearance or reflection only), and ata eva chopamA sUryakAdivat.h (therefore the analogy, "like a reflected sun, etc") of the Brahma sutras, and shruti statements such as rUpaM rUpam pratirUpo babhUva (He assumed the likeness of each form) (Br. Up. 2.5.19), lend the basis for the reflection theory.

Some say that the reflection is real. For example, if a face is reflected in a mirror, the image itself is not the face, and therefore not the real face. But the features of the face which are seen in the reflection (after compensating for the effect of lateral-inversion) are also actually present in the face. To that extent, some authenticity or reality may be assigned to the reflection. This argument is called pratibimba-vAda and is put forth very early in Shankara's school by PadmapAda, the author of panchapAdikA.

Others, such as the VArtikAra Sureshvara, hold that the reflection is a mere appearance and is, therefore, unreal. This view is called AbhAsa-vAda. One may easily see that there is no dispute between the two views. When Brahman is reflected as many jIvas, pratibimba-vAda holds that the jIva, although a reflection of Brahman, is in essence the same as Brahman. Understanding of sentences, such as "tattvamasi" which leads to realization of Brahman, involves giving up the limiting factors of the jIva as not real, and accepting the essential nature of jIva as Brahman. As per the AbhAsavAda, the realization that the reflection is itself bondage and realizing that this reflection is unreal or getting rid of this reflection is liberation, as MadhusUdana SarasvatI sums up, "

शुद्ध-चैतन्यस्याभास एव बन्धः तत्त्विवृत्तिः मोक्ष इति."

Thus the two approaches, namely pratibimba-vAda and AbhAsavAda, have the same objective, establishing that Brahman/Consciousness is the only reality.
If (illusory) silver perceived in the nacre (oyster shell) is capable of producing ornaments such as bracelets, etc., then your sorrowful cycle of birth and death may be capable of giving you liberation. O mind-bee! You roam about without purpose in the joyless desert of worldly matters. Worship (taste) the pure nectar of the lotus feet of Lakshmi-Narasimha!

Notes:

This verse points out that as the illusory silver seen in the nacre cannot be used to make real ornaments, such as a bracelet, etc., the never ending cycle of birth and death may be capable of giving you liberation. Simply because the jIva may have spent millions of lives does not guarantee that it will be liberated. There is no "seniority-based promotion" of the jIva to a liberated state! Promotion only results from "merit", where this merit is the removal of avidya or ajnAna!

The Vedaanta paribhaashhaa of dharmaraaja adhvarin defines these three orders of reality (satya):

यद्व त्रिवर्ध सत्त्रेय पारमार्थिकसत्त्रेय ब्रह्मणः व्यावहारिक सत्त्रमाकाशादे: प्रातिभासिकं सत्त्रेय शुचिरज्ञातादे:।

The reality of Brahman is paaramaarthika satya, the reality of the objective world, which includes space etc., is vyavahaarika satya, and the illusory appearance of silver in nacre (oyster-shell) is praatibhaasika satya.

According to advaita theory of anirvachanIya-khyAti, the silver perceived here and now in the nacre is explained as something caused by ajnaana associated with the substratum nacre. This ajnaana hides the real nature of the substratum (nacre) and projects the appearance of silver. Once the nacre is recognized as nacre, the illusion disappears. The silver that is perceived in the illusion is not real, because it is sublated by the knowledge of the nacre. Yet it cannot be unreal because it is perceived during the illusion phase; what is unreal is something fictitious or purely imaginary, such as the horns of a hare. So the illusory silver cannot be defined as either real.
or unreal, and it cannot be both real and unreal, which is a contradiction. The illusory silver is, therefore, called anirvachanlya or indefinable.

It is also pointed out that any illusion has to be based on a real substratum. The silver seen in the nacre is a superimposition (adhyaaropa or adhyaasa) on the nacre, the substratum (adhishhThaana). It is impossible to have an illusion which is not based on an underlying substratum.

The above argument was made from the standpoint of the vyaavahaarika reality. A similar argument may be made from the standpoint of the paaramaarthika reality to show the dualistic world (jagat) is also indefinable (anirvachaniyaa). Before the removal of ajnAna, the dualistic world is perceived. It is not a purely fictitious entity. Again, after ajnAna has been removed, there is no duality. So the dualistic world cannot be categorically stated to be either real or unreal. It is anirvachanlya or indefinable.

If the dualistic world is an illusion just as the silver in the nacre, it must necessarily be a superimposition on a real "something" as the substratum. This "something" is indeed Brahman.

The VishhNusahasra naama contains the words adhishhThaanaM, which Shankara describes as Brahman, and aadhaaranilayaH, the support or substratum of all supports.

आकृतिसाम्याचार्यत्मलिङ्कुमे स्थलनिनततब्रह्ममकरः:

गन्धरसाैविदु मिथ विदेते विफलं भ्राम्यम् भृसाविरहसे प्रसिद्धं।

चेतोभृध्म भ्रमसि वृथा भवमर्मभूमै विरसाया

भज भज लक्ष्मीनारसिंहानाथाध्यक्षकमकरंदम ॥ ३ ॥

Due to similarity in form, you mistake (mistook) the flower of the cotton tree for a lotus (having the attributes of lotus). Do you have any sense of smell and taste? You roam about in this extremely dry place without success. O mind-bee! You roam about without purpose in the joyless desert of worldly matters. Worship (taste) the pure nectar of the lotus feet of Lakshmi-Narasimha!

Notes:
It is futile to strive for worldly pleasures, for they come and go just like misery. PrahlAda, one of the greatest bhAgavatas, makes the following observations in the bhAgavata (7th Skandha, Chapter 6):

यथा हि पुरुषयेह विषयो: पादोपसर्पणाम्।

श्रीलक्ष्मीनारसिंहपदश्ररं
A person should strive only to worship the feet of BhagavAn ViShNu, for He is the dear Self (Atman) of all beings, their Lord and friend as well. The pleasures related to the senses, O Daityas, are easily obtained without any special effort due to destiny (karma) by all embodied beings, simply by virtue of possession of a body, just as sorrow or pains are obtained (without actually striving for them). Therefore, no effort needs to be made towards obtaining pleasures, as that would be wasting one's life, and would not lead to the attainment of well-being of devotion to the feet of Mukunda.

The worldly pleasures are just an illusion and a wise person should not pursue them. Such pleasures and pains come and go without the need for any special effort. Illusion or superimposition goes by several names such as adhyAropa, adhyAsa, bhrama, etc.

Shankara, in his introduction to the commentary on the Brahma sutras, gives a definition of superimposition:

अध्यासो नाम अतस्मिन्तदुःखि: (adhyAso nAma atasmintadbuddhiH),
superimposition is the cognition of something as something else.

Superimposition may be of two types. 1) An object is mistaken for something else as a rope is mistaken for a snake. 2) An attribute of something else is mistakenly cognized in an object. For example, a colorless crystal placed in the proximity of a red flower appears as if the crystal itself is red.

The common superimposition is that the dualistic world is superimposed on Brahman. The body is superimposed on the Self. Also, attributes that are not found in the Self are superimposed on It. As Shankara says, for example, a person thinks, "sthUlo .ahaM", (I am fat), "kR^isho .ahaM" (I am lean), "gauro .ahaM" (I am fair complexioned), etc. Thus attributes of the body are mistaken as being present in the Self.

The question can now be raised: Why does everyone commit the mistake of superimposing something else on the Self? How does one get rid of this superimposition?
Answers Shankara in his introduction to the sUtra bhAShya:

नेत्राणिको मिथ्याप्रत्ययः, कतर्क्यभोक्तः क्षणवर्तको अध्यायः, सवलोकप्रत्यक्षः।
अस्य अनेकोऽध्यास: आत्मानुविद्याप्रतिपतं सर्वं वैद्यं आर्याभ्यर्ते।

adhyAsa (superimposition), which is natural (to everyone), is a false notion that impels one to do things and enjoy or experience the results of actions. This adhyAsa is experienced by the whole world. In order to remove this cause of evil, and to realize the One Self, all (study in) vedAnta (upanishhads) is begun.

खण्डन्यानितादीन्विषयानुसारदानमत्वा तत्र विहरसे।
गण्धन्यातिसद्य नः तेव भोगान्तरसुः कृत्त: स्या।
चेतोभृजः भ्रमसि वृथा भवमरूंमूः विरसाय:।
भज भज लक्ष्मीनारसिहं धपदसरसिंजामकरन्दम्॥ ४ ॥

Considering that garlands, perfumes, women, etc., yield happiness, you wander about seeking pleasure (from them). Surely, those will, after (transitory) enjoyment, bring only sorrow to you, just as to the Priyangu creeper. O mind-bee! You roam about without purpose in the joyless desert of worldly matters. Worship (taste) the pure nectar of the lotus feet of Lakshmi-Narasimha!

Notes:

In this verse, a reference is made to the Priyangu creeper which is said to produce flowers if touched by women (strINAM sparshAt.h priyaN^gurvikasati). But more often than not, the flowers so produced are plucked by the women who may use the flowers for decoration. This leads to the sad condition of the creeper.

The BhagavadgItA has a relevant verse:

ये हि संस्पर्शं भोगा दुःखयोनयं पदव ते।
आधन्तवन्त: कौन्तेय न तेषु रमते वुधः॥

श्रीलक्ष्मीनारसिह्षरङ्गम्
O Arjuna! Enjoyments arising from contact with sense objects are only causes of sorrow and they have a beginning and an end. The person of discrimination (vivekin) does not delight in them.

The commentary of Madhusudana SarasvatI on this verse is illuminating. A few remarks drawn from the gUdArtha-dlpika:

"हि यस्माचे संस्पर्शांज विषयेनिद्रयसंबन्धं भोगाः हृदसुखवधानमुभवा इह वा पत्र वा रागद्वारादिव्यासत्त्वें दुःखयोनय एव ते ते सर्वं श्रौ ब्रह्मलोकपर्यन्त दुःखहेतुव एव।"

Those enjoyments arising from the contact of sense and their objects are experiences of trivial and infinitesimal joy either in this world or the world beyond. Being associated with (pervaded by) attachment and aversion, they all are causes of sorrow indeed (in all worlds) up to Brahmloka.

Therefore, the ViShNu purANa says:

"यावतः कृत्तेज जन्तुः संबन्धायमनसः प्रियानू।
तावन्तो तस्य निन्दन्ते हृदये शोकशाश्वः।"

As many as a jIva (individual soul) creates associations (with sense objects) that are pleasurable to the mind, so many are the arrows of grief that pierce his heart.

Even being so, those (enjoyments) are not permanent but have a beginning and an end. The beginning is when the sense organ and its object come into contact, and the end is the separation of the (sense organ and the object). Both those two (ie. beginning and end)
are thus known in those (enjoyments). Those (enjoyments) are nonexistent (or unreal) before and after (the contact of the sense organ and the object) and they are manifest just like a dream in the middle phase (when there is contact). (So) they are fleeting and unreal.

Therefore, Acharya Gaudapada says (Gaudapada ArkikA-vaitathya-prakāraṇa-6):

ादावन्ते च यत्रास्ति वत्मनि श्री तत्तथा इति।

That which does not exist in the beginning and the end does not exist in the present (middle) also.

The summary of the argument above is as follows. Enjoyments derived from contacts of sense organs with their objects are, besides being only causes of grief, fleeting and transient. There is no enjoyment before contact and the enjoyment stops after separation. Whatever enjoyment is felt in the middle is unreal like a dream. So the person of discrimination should not be engaged in seeking such transient enjoyment.

तब हितमेंक वचनं वक्ष्ये श्रृङ्गु सुखकामो यदि सततं
स्वप्ने दृष्टं सकलं हि मृणा जागर्ति च स्मर तद्दिति।
चेतोभृजं भ्रमसि वृथा भवमयुष्मौ विरसायां
भज भज लक्ष्मीनारसिंहानाथपदसरसिङ्गकर्तनम्॥ ५ ॥

If you desire joy always, I will say something that is beneficial to you. Whatever is seen in a dream is unreal; remember (what is seen) in the waking state is likewise. O mind-bee! You roam about without purpose in the joyless desert of worldly matters. Worship (taste) the pure nectar of the lotus feet of Lakshmi-Narasimha!
Notes:

As GauDapAda says, "svapnajAgaratisthAne hyekamAhurmanIshhiNaH", the waking and dream states are said to be alike by the wise. The ground of inference or hetu in this case is the property of "being perceived" which is present in objects of the dream and waking states alike.

The SarasvatI-rahasya-upanishhad states:

अस्ति भाति ग्रियं रूपं नाम चेत्त्यंशपश्चकम्।
आयं तथं ब्रह्मरूपं जगद्रूपं ततो द्रूपम्॥

Existence, Consciousness, Bliss, Name, and Form - of these five, the first three belong to Brahman, and the other two form the world (mAyA).

Whatever is perceived either in dream or in the waking state falls into the category of nAma-rUpa, is mAyA and, therefore, not real.

Whatever is perceived either in dream or in the waking state is not perceived before its birth (creation), is perceived from birth until its destruction and again, it is not perceived after destruction. Therefore, the reality that can be assigned to objects in the waking and dream states is similar to the illusory reality of the silver in nacre, i.e. a prAtibhAsika satya. These do not exist either before or after the period of cognition. This leads to what is called dR^ishhTi-sR^ishhTi-vAda in advaita.

In fact, MadhusUdana SarasvatI points out that verse 2.28 in the GItA accepts this dR^ishhTi-sR^ishhTi principle.

अव्यक्तादीनि भूतानि व्यक्तमध्यानि भारत।
अव्यक्तनिधानेयेव तत्र का परिदेवना ॥ २५॥

Part of MadhusUdana's commentary:

आदौ जन्मनं प्रागव्यक्तानि अनुपलन्ध्यानि भूतानि पृथिव्यदिशमृत-मयानि शरीराणि मध्ये
जन्मान्तरं मण्डलाण्व्यक्तानि उपलयानि सन्नि। निघे पुनःप्रागव्यक्तानेयं भवन्ति। यथा
स्वभेदानुजालो श्रीमताप्रभासावलीनानि शुकीर्यप्यदिशंतू न ज्ञानहत्याग्नावं वा स्थितानि दृष्टि-
सृष्टिमयुगमात। तथा च आदानाने च यथासत्त वर्तमाने वपि तत्तथा इति न्यायन मध्ये वपि
न सत्येततानि। नासतो विद्यते भावः इति प्राप्तकेश।
In the beginning, before birth, (these) bodies that are made of the elements such as earth, etc., are not perceived. In the middle, after birth and before death, (they) are perceived. Upon death, they again are not perceived. Because dR^ishhT-sR^ishhTi is admitted, (these bodies), like the (illusory) silver in the nacre, do not exist either before or after cognition, (but) exist only as an illusion, just as a dream, the trick of a magician, etc. And by the logic of the (statement of the mANDUkya kArikA), "That which does not exist in the beginning and the end does not exist in the present (middle) also", these (bodies) do not exist in the middle too (ie. during the period of cognition). Furthermore, by the (GItA statement), "the unreal can never come into existence", (it is shown that these bodies cannot exist in the middle too).

आनन्द-हुदूली-प्रणीताङ्गभाषानुवादित्तप्पणीसहितलक्ष्मीनुसिंह-
पद्मरं समासम्।

॥ श्रीलक्ष्मीनुसिंहार्णमस्तु ॥

श्रीलक्ष्मीनुसिंहपञ्चरलम् 10
श्रीलक्ष्मीनृसिंहपञ्चरत्नम्

लक्ष्मीजीविनियमम्यछसि चेनरहिपुज्ञां कुरु सततं
प्रतिचित्यवालांकृतिकुशालो चिंबालकृतिमात्रुते।
चेतोभुज्ञ भ्रमसि वृथा भवमभूमी विरसायां
भज भज लक्ष्मीनरसिंहं तपदसरसिजसमकन्तम्॥ १॥
शूचौ रजतप्रतिभा जाता कटकार्यसबंधं चे
हेच्छमयी ते संसूतिरेषा निर्विन्दिनाने नियुणा स्यात्।
चेतोभुज्ञ भ्रमसि वृथा भवमभूमी विरसायां
भज भज लक्ष्मीनरसिंहं तपदसरसिजसमकन्तम्॥ २॥
आकृतिसाम्याच्छलमलिङ्गमेः स्थलनिन्दन्तवभ्रमकरः
गन्धरसाविह किमु विचेते विफलं भ्रान्यसि भृजाविसे अर्तिनं।
चेतोभुज्ञ भ्रमसि वृथा भवमभूमी विरसायां
भज भज लक्ष्मीनरसिंहं तपदसरसिजसमकन्तम्॥ ३॥
सकन्तनविनिताद्विनिषयानुपुसवदानमतः तत्र विहरसे
गन्धफलीसस्त्रया नन्दू तेसः भोगन्तरसुखालं रम्।
चेतोभुज्ञ भ्रमसि वृथा भवमभूमी विरसायां
भज भज लक्ष्मीनरसिंहं तपदसरसिजसमकन्तम्॥ ४॥
तव हितमेकं वचनं बक्ष्ये शुणु सुखकामो यदि सततं
स्वमेव द्वेष सकलं हि मृथा जागरितं च स्मरं तहदिदित।
चेतोभुज्ञ भ्रमसि वृथा भवमभूमी विरसायां
भज भज लक्ष्मीनरसिंहं तपदसरसिजसमकन्तम्॥ ५॥

श्रीलक्ष्मीनृसिंहपञ्चरत्नम्
tvatprabhuṣijapriyamīcchasi cennarharipūjām kuru satataṁ
pratibimbālaṅkṛtikūśalo bimbālaṅkṛtimātante

ācetobhrṣṇa bhramasi vṛthā bhavamarubhūmau virasāyāṁ
bhaja bhaja lakṣmīnaraśimhānaghapadasarasijamakaranandam ॥ 1 ॥

śuktau rajataprabhī jātā kaṭakādyarthasamarthā ce-
dduḥkhamayi te sarṣṭiresā nirvṛtidāne nipūṇā syāt

ācetobhrṣṇa bhramasi vṛthā bhavamarubhūmau virasāyāṁ
bhaja bhaja lakṣmīnaraśimhānaghapadasarasijamakaranandam ॥ 2 ॥

ākṛtisāmyācchāmalikusume sthanalalinatvabhramamakaroḥ
gandharasāviha kimu vidyete viphalāṁ bhrāmyasi bhṛśavirase 'smin

cetobhrṣṇa bhramasi vṛthā bhavamarubhūmau virasāyāṁ
bhaja bhaja lakṣmīnaraśimhānaghapadasarasijamakaranandam ॥ 3 ॥

srakcandananitādvinīṣayānsukhadāṇmatvā tatra viharase
gandhaphalisadṛśā nanu te'mi bhogānantaraduḥkhakṛtaḥ syuḥ

cetobhrṣṇa bhramasi vṛthā bhavamarubhūmau virasāyāṁ
bhaja bhaja lakṣmīnaraśimhānaghapadasarasijamakaranandam ॥ 4 ॥

tava hitamekaṁ vacanāṁ vakṣye śṛṇu sukhakāmo yadi satataṁ
svapne dṛṣṭatāṁ sakalam hi mṛśā jāgrati ca smara tadvaditi

cetobhrṣṇa bhramasi vṛthā bhavamarubhūmau virasāyāṁ
bhaja bhaja lakṣmīnaraśimhānaghapadasarasijamakaranandam ॥ 5 ॥