In the Mandukya Upanishad, where there is an objective analysis of the human mind and the nature of the Self, we are told there are four states of consciousness:

1. Vaishvanara: the waking state
2. Taijasa: the dreaming state
3. Prajna: the state of deep sleep
4. Turiya: the transcendental state

**Vaishvanara: the waking state**

Here we turn outwards receiving the world through the senses. Most of our understanding is derived in this state but it can only ever be a partial understanding as it will be clouded by our conditioning. It is a subjective state where we perceive according to our past experiences, our cultural norms, and general state of awareness and so on.

**Taijasa: the dreaming state**

Here the senses are turned inwardly and we enact our past actions and future desires. It is a subjective state where we are charmed by the subtler creations of our minds. Dreaming enables us to digest the thoughts and emotions of our daily lives where there are unexpected associations made. By becoming aware of our dreams we can better know what is just beneath our conscious mind.

**Prajna: the state of deep sleep**

In a way this is a non-event as there is no awareness of our body, mind or senses in deep sleep, but we are aware of whether we have slept well and it is a great relief to retreat into sleep. It can be interesting to notice how we feel in the moments just before sleeping and awaking when there is a sense of Being.

**Turiya: the transcendental state**

This is the state of Kaivalya or Liberation, literally meaning singularity or aloneness, where there is only the Pure Self or Pure Consciousness. It can only be know by becoming it, where there is the end of all activity. Here there is complete satisfaction, the end of all desire.

*Within this Upanishad we are also told:*

* If we are aware of our conscious mind, possessing enough stillness to knowing the contents of our mind as they arise, having mastery of our senses, choosing rather than reacting then we obtain what we desire and can become great in this world.
* If we are aware of our dreaming state then wisdom is ours.
* If we can become aware within deep sleep then we will experience the Self at the heart; indeed a truly enlightened person can be known by this ability to remain aware within sleep. We can then become a Guru or teacher who can help others in their spiritual journey.
* We can know the Self where all of our desires and search for happiness can be met.
* The mind, body and senses emerge out of consciousness; the mind is not the source of consciousness.
* The State of Being is prior to the individual & we can experience the Knower when awake, dreaming or asleep.

The Upanishads are vedantic texts, vedanta meaning ‘the end of or development of the Vedas’, so that here the wisdom of the Vedas is accepted but the interjection of the Brahmins was rejected as groups went to the quiet places, such as mountains and forests, to directly experience the Truth of existence through meditation.

In mystical terms the Upanishads can be thought of as an example of via positiva where we can become All That Is, i.e. Brahman, and that the manifest world, our bodies, mind, senses and nature itself are held to be sacred and worthy of praise. We also find via negativa where the spiritual path is one of increasingly dis-identifying with the manifest world, often summed up as ‘neti neti’ meaning ‘not this, not that’. In a real sense there is both, bringing balance. It could be said that focusing too much on via negativa diminishes our capacity to find joy in this world.

Also see:

Brihadaranayaka Upanishad: Chapter 4