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By Easan Katir and Thamby Kumaran

Taoism, by filmmaker Elda Hartley. 120 min. \$39.95. Order from:Hartley Film Foundation, Inc. Cat Rock Road, Cos Cob, CT, USA 06807 (203) 869-1818

I really liked this finely-crafted video journey into China and the heart of the Tao. It's enveloped by gorgeous imagery-tiny shrines teetering on the edges of mountain cliffs, deep limestone gorges of the Yangste, the awesome Great Wall and shots of everyday life in China. It's engagingly narrated by John Blofeld, famed author of a Taoism classic *The Secret and the Sublime*, who has spent the last 40 years in and around China, in monasteries with Taoist masters, absorbing its mysticism. About half of the video holds the lens on Blofeld alone, dressed in his elegant Taoist hermit's black robe, narrating in a quiet glen.

Tao is literally "The Way" yet, according to John Blofeld, it is perhaps better described as something so mysterious and sublime it is best called the "Nameless." Seen one way it is infinite, indivisible, pure void, wholeness. Yet seen another way, it is the very stuff of the universe. It's akin to the Buddhist concept of Nirvana but even closer to the Hindu idea of Satchidananda (pure consciousness) or Shakti (divine energy) and totally elusive to the intellect looking to hold it too firm. The Taoist does not consider God as a being but rather "beingness" itself. One important Taoist icon explained is the Yin Yang, symbol of the universal male/female energies and a unity at the heart of perpetual differences and flux. (This free-roaming cosmic symbol even found its way onto the pillars of

## Chidambaram Temple!)

Another potent symbol discussed is water, the river of life. Ideally, a Taoist flows tranquilly along with life's circumstances, circumventing obstacles rather than fighting them. (Photos at right not from video footage.)

Mahabharata, Produced & directed by B.R. Chopra & Ravi Chopra. 47 volumes. US\$449.00/set in Hindi, \$499.00/set with English subtitles. Plus shipping \$18.00 per set & tax if a Texas resident. Available through: Atlantic Video Co., Inc., 17750 Preston Road, Dallas, TX 75252 1-800-259-3445 or 214-248-3500

This is the most famous film version of India's greatest and the world's longest epic poem-the conflict between two kingdoms, the Pandavas and the Kauravas, and their great battle of Kurukshetra near modern Delhi in 1424bce. Woven through the plot are countless discourses on philosophy, religion, astronomy, cosmology, politics, economics and many stories illustrative of Hinduism's abiding ethical principles. Renowned filmmakers, B.R. Chopra and Ravi Chopra make it bigger than life with famous movie stars and a cast of thousands in a big, big-budget production. I invited some friends over to watch the first three volumes with my family and jotted down their exclamations: "God is the narrator! You won't find this in the West or see two queens and a maid magically impregnated by the transcendental powers of a sage on Western TV either!" "At first glance, this is soap opera for the Gods. But that is a revelation in itself!" "One could get hooked on this." "I was in India when this was being shown on national TV. It was extraordinarily popular. In my town, if you were viewing in your home, it was considered bad manners to not invite passersbys and neighbors in to watch. The film had a big impact after it came out. Youth began to study and read this epic poem. It, along with the Ramayana, became best sellers, again." "In volume one, if you don't know the story that well, it is a little appalling when the goddess Ganga, who became a queen, killed her first seven sons by drowning them in the river. One learns in later volumes that these sons were paying for their own actions in previous lives. Still, pretty mean queen!" "King Shantanu sure seems easily infatuated with all the pretty women down by the river!" "The literal translation (in the English subtitles) of Prince Bishma's name is 'Terrible.' It should be more like "Difficult" than 'Terrible' as he got his name from taking the difficult vow of celibacy." "This is interesting-the princesses get to choose whom they shall marry!" Definitely family fun and a good discussion starter.

Cooking With Kurma 2-Encyclopedia of Gourmet Vedic Vegetarian Cuisine,

Produced and directed by David Shapiro. 120 min. In English. US\$24.95 plus shipping. (Free preview video and catalogue available.)

Order from: ITV Productions, 3755 Watseka Ave. #200, Los Angeles, CA 90034 4058. (310) 559-7100. Wonderful video of four, half-hour episodes (of an 11-tape series) in which chef wiz Kurma instructs how to cook Indian vegetarian cuisine. His likeable, religious personality make it a totally fun experience. The first episode is devoted to lentil soups, the second to rice dishes, the third to breads and the fourth to chutneys and raitas. The two-camera production (one is overhead) is excellent. This series is extremely popular and was aired on PBS stations in California. Engaged? Don't know how to cook? Get this quick, girls. Guys too!