



The Seven Bodyguards: Cultivating Strength in Mind and Body

In ancient Chinese thought, a person is composed of **3 parts Shen (mind/spirit)** and **7 parts Bao (qualities)** martrix.org. The Shen is the inner spirit or consciousness, while the seven **Bao** are like personal “bodyguards” that protect our life. As the old saying goes, “*When the mind is in the right setting, life will follow suit.*” martrix.org In other words, a strong Shen aligned with its seven protective qualities lets life flow smoothly. Another proverb adds, “*Evil is afraid of man seven times, while man is afraid of evil three times,*” implying that when our Shen and Bao are strong, we become essentially “*immune to Evil.*” martrix.org Thus, fortifying these seven qualities shields our social and professional life like a **firewall** martrix.orgmartrix.org. By Roland Nansink



The **Seven Bodyguards** themselves are traditionally listed as **Health, Self-Esteem, Happiness, Contact, Career, Freedom, and Master** martrix.org. Think of each one as guarding a key part of your life: physical well-being, confidence, joy, relationships, purpose, personal liberty, and mastery of skill or spirit. According to MartriX (a school of ancient Taoist martial arts), when “*all [seven] qualities...function properly we can consider our life and work being protected,*” but if any are weak, we must identify the gap and strengthen it martrix.org. In this ebook, we will explore each bodyguard in depth: blending martial-arts philosophy, Taoist wisdom, and practical exercises so you can train and integrate all seven qualities. We will draw on classic teachings – from **Lao Tzu’s Tao Te Ching** to **Sun Tzu’s Art of War** and even Don Juan’s warrior path – and also highlight MartriX resources (their downloadable eBooks like *Tao Te Ching*, *Art of War*, and *Wuyiquan*) that strengthen mental, physical, and spiritual resilience martrix.orgmartrix.org. With these tools, you’ll learn how to keep your Shen aligned and your seven Bao acting as steadfast bodyguards.

Table of Contents

1. Chapter 1: The Celestial Guardian (Shen)

- *Theme:* Cultivate **Shen** (神), the sacred spirit – the inner flame and watchful protector. As Taoist alchemy teaches, “if we protect the spirit, we will live long” shambhala.com. Shen is the candlelight of awareness, fragile yet radiant path-of-dao-qigong.ch.
- *Exercises:*
 - *Inner Flame Meditation:* Quiet sitting at dawn, visualizing a candle flame at the heart to calm the mind and nurture Shen.
 - *Breath-Light Qi Gong:* Slow abdominal breathing and gentle microcosmic orbit exercises to circulate and strengthen the inner light.

2. Chapter 2: The Breath Guardian (Qi)

- *Theme:* Harness **Qi** (氣), the vital lifeblood of body and mind. In Taoism, Qi is one of the Three Treasures (San Bao) of life path-of-dao-qigong.ch. Learn to harmonize breath and movement so that energy flows freely through the body.
- *Exercises:*
 - *Flowing Breath Practice:* Deep abdominal breathing exercises (e.g. **cloud-hand Qigong**) and slow tai chi forms to open energy channels.
 - *Movement Meditation:* Gentle continuous movement (such as tai chi or yoga-like stretches) timed with the breath, awakening the Dragon’s Qi.

3. Chapter 3: The Earth Guardian (Jing)

- *Theme:* Build the body’s foundation through **Jing** (精), the deep essence. Jing is “the root of our vitality” stored in marrow

and blood path-of-dao-qigong.ch.

Strengthening Jing means nourishing the physical body and will, like watering the roots of a tree.

- *Exercises:*
 - *Rooting Stances:* Horse stance, bow stance and stance-holding exercises to develop leg strength and endurance.
 - *Conditioning Drills:* Bodyweight exercises (push-ups, squats) and Qigong postures (Iron Palm or Iron Shirt training) to harden muscles and bones.

4. Chapter 4: The Iron Will (Discipline)

- *Theme:* Forge **willpower and discipline** as inner armor. Establish daily ritual and unwavering routine: this is the warrior's vow. Embrace simplicity and consistency in training, mirroring the Taoist embrace of **wu wei** (effortless effort) through dedicated practice.
- *Exercises:*
 - *Morning Ritual:* A set routine (salute, stretching, affirmation) to start each day with focus.
 - *Endurance Challenge:* Timed drills (holding plank or stance for increasing periods) and cold-shower immersion to test and build mental resolve.

5. Chapter 5: The Silent Guardian (Mindfulness)

- *Theme:* Sharpen the mind's focus and clarity. Cultivate **mindfulness** (心, *xin*) through stillness, learning to see beyond distractions. Develop “clear seeing” by noticing the small and subtle – a gift of meditation and awareness.
- *Exercises:*
 - *Zhan Zhuang (Standing Meditation):* Stand motionless (e.g. as a tree or crane) to quiet the mind and sink attention inward.

- *Focus Training:* Target-drills with eyes closed or single-point concentration practices (drawing a bow or simple kung-fu forms) to train unwavering focus.

6. Chapter 6: The Compassionate Guardian (Heart)

- *Theme:* Embrace **compassion and humility** as true strength. Taoist lore calls compassion (慈, *cí*) and moderation (儉, *jiǎn*) among the Three Jewels of virtue en.wikipedia.org. A martial soul wields power with mercy and respects all life.
- *Exercises:*
 - *Partner Sensitivity:* Cooperative sparring or pushing-hand practice (Tui Shou) to cultivate empathy and protect rather than harm.
 - *Metta Meditation:* Loving-kindness practice, extending goodwill to self and others, reinforcing the warrior's gentle heart.

7. Chapter 7: The Guardian of Harmony (Unity)

- *Theme:* Integrate all seven guardians into **balance and harmony**. Unite Yin and Yang within your training. As Wudang masters demonstrate, the true warrior “completes the balance of strength and grace, vitality and stillness” shenyun.org. Seek the Tao (道) path where opposites dance in unison.
- *Exercises:*
 - *Harmonious Form:* A flowing form (such as sun-style tai chi or an Eight-Section Brocade) that blends power and softness with mindful breath shenyun.org.
 - *Moving Meditation:* Walking Qigong or river-sound meditation (slow gait with reciting a verse) to feel the unity of mind, breath, and movement.

Prologue

Long ago, sages spoke of **Shen** (神) – the immortal spirit – as a sacred flame within us. Laozi named it “the valley that does not die”, a deep wellspring between Heaven and Earth. His disciple Heshang Gong later taught: “Valley means protection. If we are able to protect the spirit, we will live long and never die” shambhala.com. In this ancient vision, **Bao**(保, to protect) becomes the vow to guard that flame. Thus the martial journey begins at the heart: nurturing Shen, the candlelight of awareness, as the warrior’s first bodyguard path-of-dao-qigong.ch.

As the young warrior steps onto the path, the world becomes an invisible battlefield. Yet even here the Tao is our ally. Ancient Daoists believed man stands inseparably between Heaven and Earth, and that to follow the Way is to align with their energies path-of-dao-qigong.ch. In modern terms, one guide speaks of cultivating seven inner guardians to thrive in this unseen arena martrix.org. These Bodyguards of the soul are not magic talismans, but qualities forged by breath, posture, and spirit.

This book is your dojo of the mind and body, a training hall of the self. With each chapter you will awaken a guardian within: from the luminous Spirit to the rooted Earth, from still Mind to compassionate Heart, culminating in harmonious Unity. Each theme is steeped in Taoist wisdom and martial resolve; each exercise is a step on the warrior’s inner journey. Let this Prologue kindle your courage – as the candle must be tended with care, so too must Shen and Bao guide you on the way.



1. Health – The Bodyguard of Vitality

Image: Zhan Zhuang (standing post) – a Taoist exercise for foundational health.

Health is the foundation of all achievement. A warrior's body must be strong and well-conditioned to endure any trial. In traditional Eastern training this means cultivating **Qi** – the life energy – through practices like **Qigong** and **Tai Chi**. Modern research confirms that such mind-body exercises have real benefits: studies show that daily Qigong can “*reduce symptoms of depression*” and anxiety, improve balance, and even *boost immune function* [health.clevelandclinic.org](https://health.clevelandclinic.org/health/clevelandclinic.org). In martial terms, a healthy bodyguard keeps your frame resilient so stress or fatigue cannot overwhelm you. Martial artists practice fundamentals (stances, forms, kicks) not only to learn technique but to strengthen muscles, bones, and the cardio-metabolic system.

To develop the Health bodyguard, combine physical training with Taoist balance. **Zhan Zhuang** (standing meditation) is one example – holding a steady stance with relaxed posture to build leg strength and inner calm

martrix.org. Performing slow, mindful movements forces you to breathe deeply and relax tension, which circulates Qi and calms the nervous system. The Tao emphasizes *balance*: avoid rigid extremes in diet or exercise. Instead, follow your body's signals (like water adjusting its flow) and include rest and recovery. As MartriX notes, their training isn't just physical – it also incorporates mental/spiritual forms (like Intuitive Boxing) to get optimum results martrix.org.

- **Daily Qigong or Tai Chi (15–30 min):** Practice simple sets to improve energy flow and reduce stress health.clevelandclinic.org.
- **Strength & Endurance Training:** Do push-ups, squats, running or martial arts conditioning 2–3 times/week. Build up gradually.
- **Flexibility and Balance:** Include stretching or yoga moves and practice balance (one-legged stances) to prevent injury.
- **Breathwork:** Spend a few minutes each day doing deep abdominal breathing (4–6 breaths/minute) to calm the body.
- **Nutrition & Rest:** Eat whole, natural foods and sleep 7–8 hours nightly. Adequate recovery is part of training.

Consistent, mindful practice is key. Even a few minutes of standing posture or Qigong each day reinforces health. Over time you'll feel greater stamina and less susceptibility to illness – your Health bodyguard will have grown stronger.



2. Self-Esteem – The Bodyguard of Confidence

Self-Esteem is the warrior's inner confidence and self-worth. In martial arts, it's the bravery that allows you to stand undaunted by challenge. Don Juan (Carlos Castaneda's Yaqui mentor) teaches that *"fear is the first enemy... a terrible enemy"*, but urges the warrior to *"be fully afraid and not give in, just move forward"* martrix.org. In facing fear rather than fleeing it, you build courage and trust in yourself – key facets of self-esteem. The Tao Te Ching similarly teaches self-knowledge: *"Knowing yourself is true wisdom; mastering yourself is true power"* harinam.com. Cultivating self-esteem means appreciating your abilities and accepting your limits as areas to grow.

Martial artists build confidence through discipline and gradual challenge. Each new belt or skill attained proves your capability. To strengthen this bodyguard, practice skills that stretch your comfort zone. For example, spar with a slightly better opponent (with safety gear) or attempt a complex form. As you overcome these small trials, you'll trust your own ability more. Research also supports this: a study found that adolescents engaged in regular martial arts training showed significant **increases in**



self-esteem and reduced aggression [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/). This suggests that the focused, structured practice and achievement in martial arts does nurture self-confidence.

- **Reflect on Successes:** Write down past achievements (graduating belts, learning a tough technique). Reviewing this list reminds you of your strengths.
- **Set Short Challenges:** Give yourself incremental goals (e.g. memorizing a new kata or increasing reps). Achieving them boosts competence.
- **Face a Fear:** Identify one small fear (public speaking, tight sparring) and meet it head-on in training. Each time you do, your self-trust grows.
- **Positive Self-Talk:** Use affirmations before practice. For example, while shadowboxing, tell yourself *“I am strong and capable”*. Posture and words together build belief.

- **Teach or Mentor:** Guiding others (showing a newbie a move) reinforces that *you* know enough to help – a powerful self-esteem builder.
- **Warrior Reading:** Read inspiring martial or philosophical tales (Don Juan stories, samurai legends). Let the warrior ideal bolster your self-image.

By consistently honoring your achievements and meeting challenges, you train your confidence like a muscle. Over time you'll feel steadier in your own skin, speaking and moving with authority – the Self-Esteem bodyguard firmly at your side.



3. Happiness – The Bodyguard of Joy

Happiness here means a deep sense of contentment and joy in life, not fleeting pleasure. In Taoism, true happiness comes from simplicity and inner peace. Lao Tzu wisely notes, “*If you realize that you have enough, you are truly rich*” harinam.com. In practice, a martial artist can find happiness in the discipline of training itself, not just in winning tournaments. Learning to be present – absorbing the sounds, sights, and sensations during practice – cultivates a serene joy. Like flowing water, let happiness be natural and effortless: the Tao advocates *wu wei* (non-striving), which means enjoying the flow of each moment.

Gratitude and simplicity are key exercises for this bodyguard. Begin or end each day by listing things you appreciate (good health, a friendly training partner, simple meal). Smile often, even during effort – a smile can lift your mood and relax your mind. Don’t chase every desire: if you crave a new gadget or rank, ask yourself if you *truly need* it before acting.

- **Gratitude Journaling:** Note three things you’re grateful for each morning or evening. This trains your mind to notice positives.

- **Mindful Play:** Allocate time for playful training (e.g. free-form sparring with a fun attitude) to rediscover joy.
- **Nature Breaks:** Take walks in a park or near water. Observe beauty without judgment. The Tao Te Ching is full of nature metaphors for inner peace.
- **Simplify Desires:** Embrace contentment. For instance, follow Lao Tzu's advice by accepting "*having enough*". If you feel lacking, examine if your wants are true needs.
- **Serve Others:** Helping fellow students or volunteering in your community brings a quiet happiness that comes from compassion – a principle also valued in Taoism.

In every activity, look for the lesson and the pleasure in mastering it. As Lao Tzu says, a mind at peace is richer than gold harinam.com. Keep your focus on the process, not just outcomes, and your Happiness bodyguard will ensure a calm delight in each step of your journey.



4. Contact – The Bodyguard of Connection

Contact here means the relationships and connections that nourish us. Even a lone warrior needs allies: training partners, mentors, friends, family. The Tao reminds us that humans are part of the larger whole – just as streams inevitably flow to the sea, we thrive in community. In martial arts, trust between partners is crucial; tapping into that trust builds confidence and mutual support. On the flip side, imagine an isolated fighter vs. a team: connection provides perspective and strength.

Building Contact means strengthening social and environmental bonds. In practice, this could involve joining a dojo or group class instead of training alone. It also means listening as much as speaking – in conversations, be fully present (this is a mindful ‘martial arts for the ears’). As Sun Tzu advises knowing the terrain and your allies, so should you understand and nurture your social “terrain.”

- **Partner Drills:** Train regularly with a partner. Practice drills where you must communicate silently (eye contact, body signals) to deepen non-verbal rapport.

- **Community Involvement:** Attend workshops, seminars, or online forums in your martial arts style. Sharing tips and stories creates camaraderie.
- **Active Listening Exercise:** During a conversation, focus entirely on the other person's words and breathing. This deep attention fosters real connection.
- **Study Group:** Form a small group to read and discuss philosophical texts (like chapters of Tao Te Ching). Sharing insights builds bonds.
- **Daily Check-Ins:** Reach out to a friend or mentor each day with a quick message. It keeps lines of support open.
- **Giving and Receiving:** Offer help when you see a chance (spotting a sparring partner, teaching a technique). Being helpful often brings help back to you.

By cultivating these connections, the Contact bodyguard ensures you never truly stand alone. A strong network can lift you in tough times, offer guidance, and celebrate your successes – enriching every aspect of the warrior's path.



5. Career – The Bodyguard of Purpose

Career (or Purpose) shields our sense of mission and achievement in the world. Even outside the dojo, we apply the warrior's discipline to our vocation. Think of Sun Tzu's wisdom: "*Victorious warriors win first and then go to war.*" This means planning and self-knowledge lead to success. In career terms, set clear goals (winning the war before it's fought) and study your environment (the "enemy" could be challenges in your field).

Apply martial strategy to everyday work. Start with a mission statement or vision – what ultimate goal are you fighting for? Break it down into daily "battles" (tasks) and weekly "campaigns" (projects). Use tools like a to-do list or planner as your battle map. Learn to adapt: if one strategy fails (enemy outsmarts you), switch tactics quickly. Remember, humility and respect are virtues too: treat colleagues and competitors with honor, as Bushido encourages.

Image: The Art of War – classic strategies for daily life.
Sun Tzu's *Art of War* can guide not only generals but also your job and

life. For example, the formula “*Know yourself and know your enemy*” holds for career: understand your strengths and also study market trends or company culture. He also says “*In the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity*” – meaning that career setbacks can hide chances to pivot or innovate.

- **Define Clear Goals:** Write down your big career objective (yearly). Break it into smaller milestones (weekly/daily tasks) like a combat strategy.
- **Plan and Review:** Before starting your day, plan the most important tasks (your top “campaigns”). At day’s end, review what worked and what didn’t (learn from battle reports).
- **Continuous Learning:** Schedule regular training – just as a warrior drills, take courses or read industry books to sharpen skills.
- **Adaptability:** If a project fails, analyze why and change approach (like dodging an incoming strike and countering). Flexibility is as important in career as in combat.
- **Time Management:** Treat time like a precious resource. Use techniques like time-blocking (divide day into focused sessions) to increase efficiency.
- **Self-Care:** Even warriors rest between battles. Balance work with exercise and relaxation to avoid burnout.

A focused career bodyguard means your work life supports you, not drains you. With strategy and discipline, your professional path becomes a conscious journey, leading steadily toward mastery and success.



6. Freedom – The Bodyguard of Liberty

Freedom here means inner and outer liberty – the ability to choose your path and act authentically. Taoism emphasizes living freely and spontaneously while remaining in harmony with the Tao. A true warrior is ultimately free because he is not enslaved by fear or rigid desires. In training, this shows up as a fluid mind that can adapt. In life, it means not being trapped by others' expectations or by your own ego.

To strengthen the Freedom bodyguard, practice letting go of attachment. For example, if you fail a technique, don't curse or get discouraged – accept imperfection and try again (a kind of *wu wei* or effortless action). In

relationships, respect others' freedom and your own: don't micromanage outcomes. Meditate regularly to see thoughts come and go; this helps you recognize that *you are not your thoughts* and fosters an inner space of freedom.

- **Mindfulness Meditation:** Sit quietly each day, watching thoughts without judgment. This trains you to release mental constraints.
- **Unplug Periodically:** Take short breaks from technology and routine. E.g., spend a day without social media or drive a different route home.
- **Spontaneity in Training:** Once in a while, skip a planned routine and instead improvise a drill or form sequence. This breaks rigidity and invites creative flow.
- **Declutter:** Simplify your environment and schedule. Fewer possessions and commitments mean less to enslave you.
- **Assertiveness Practice:** Politely decline requests or behaviors that violate your core values. Asserting your boundaries enhances your sense of personal freedom.

The essence of freedom is in mastery of self – paradoxically, you gain true freedom by knowing your limits and transcending them. As Lao Tzu says, “*Mastering yourself is true power*” harinam.com. By practicing detachment and open-mindedness, you ensure the Freedom bodyguard keeps you feeling light and autonomous, able to ride the currents of life without being swept away.



7. Master – The Bodyguard of Mastery

The final Bodyguard, **Master**, represents mastery in life – of skills, character, and spirit. It is both an ongoing pursuit and a state of humility. In Taoist thought, the *Truest* Master is one who has mastered themselves. As Lao Tzu taught, “*Mastering others is strength; mastering yourself is true power.*” harinam.com This means that beyond conquering opponents or tasks, you are your own greatest project. A martial arts master practices fundamentals daily, refines the same punch or kick ad infinitum, and yet always continues learning.

MartriX describes a warrior as someone who “*override[s] your automatic behavior... and act[s] with consciousness.*” martrix.org A true master lives by that principle at all times. Every action becomes deliberate. To train this bodyguard, maintain a disciplined life. Keep a rigorous daily routine (wake early, train consistently, meditate) and treat it like a rite of passage.



Image: Wuyiquan – The Ancient Mexican Warrior Path (Don Juan’s teachings).

You may also explore deeper paths of mastery, such as MartriX’s

Wuyiquan, which blends internal martial arts with the shamanic warrior wisdom of Don Juan. This teaches that mastery involves a wide awareness – not only of technique, but of how your spirit aligns with your actions.

- **Daily Practice:** Set a long-term training schedule (for example, 100-day plan) and stick to it. Consistency is the master's way.
- **Seek a Mentor:** Study under someone wiser. A good teacher reflects your flaws, pushing you to grow – an essential part of mastery.
- **Teach Others:** Sharing knowledge forces you to clarify your understanding. Mastery blooms when you can explain a concept clearly.
- **Study Philosophy:** Read classic texts (Tao Te Ching, The Art of War) regularly. Reflect on how their insights apply to your life and training.
- **Balance Mastery and Humility:** Recognize that regardless of skill, there is always more to learn. Stay open to new ideas, even from beginners.

Each small discipline performed daily weaves into the greater tapestry of mastery. Over time, movements become effortless, decisions become clear, and you walk in the world like a genuine master – not arrogant, but completely at ease with yourself and your path.

Conclusion: Integrating the Seven Bodyguards

All seven bodyguards form a holistic shield when balanced together. The key is daily integration: review and nurture each quality regularly. MartriX refers to this system as a **firewall** – when “*all [qualities] function properly,*” your life is well-protected martrix.org. Keep the proverb in mind: “*When the mind is in the right setting, life will follow suit.*”

martrix.org Ensure your Shen (mind/spirit) is poised by clearing negativity through these practices, and then strengthen whatever Bao may be lagging.

- **Daily Checklists:** Allocate one day a week to focus on each bodyguard. For example, Monday on Health (extra workout/Qigong), Tuesday on Self-Esteem (face a fear or recite an affirmation), etc.
- **Evening Reflection:** Spend a few minutes journaling about how you advanced or need growth in each area. Adjust tomorrow’s plan accordingly.
- **Physical Reminders:** Use posture and breathing to cue mental states. (Stand tall with deep breaths when you need confidence; relax shoulders when stressed to welcome clarity.)
- **Mantra of Balance:** Repeat the proverb or a personal motto (“I train all parts of myself”) during meditation or before sleep to program the mind.
- **Continual Learning:** Keep reading and practicing (for example, revisit *Tao Te Ching* or a MartriX PDF like *Taoist Guidelines for a Peaceful Mind* martrix.org). Growth never stops.

By weaving the Seven Bodyguards into everyday life – through routines, rituals, and mindfulness – you build a resilient spirit. You become a warrior whose actions are conscious and balanced. As MartriX teaches, a person with a strong Shen and seven robust Bao is “*immune to Evil,*” and even life’s fiercest challenges cannot unsettle such an individual martrix.org. Keep training, keep reflecting, and your firewall will hold firm: indeed, when your mind is rightly aligned, every part of your life will follow suit martrix.org.

Sources: Teachings from Taoism and martial arts inform this guide, including the MartriX framework of Shen and Bao maratrix.orgmaratrix.org. References include classic texts (*Tao Te Ching*, *Art of War*) and related materials (e.g., *Wuyiquan – The Ancient Mexican Warrior Path*) as described on MartriX.orgmaratrix.orgmaratrix.org, as well as scientific and pedagogical studies on martial arts benefits health.clevelandclinic.orgpmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov. All steps are rooted in these traditions, adapted into practical exercises for modern warriors.

Epilogue

You have tended all seven inner guardians, and now they stand as a circle of strength around you. Like the Taoist disciples of Wudang, you have learned that true power lies in harmony: “strength and grace, vitality and stillness” united shenyun.org. In mastering each quality, you have woven Yin and Yang into one seamless art.

Remember the Three Jewels of the Way – **compassion, frugality, and humility** – and wear them as your truest armor en.wikipedia.org. A warrior who conquers himself wields greater might than he who conquers a thousand foes. You have built not only muscle and skill, but character and balance.

Yet the journey does not end here. The Way is endless. Carry this newfound harmony forward: with each breath, each step, embody the unity of mind and body. Let the Seven Bodyguards continue their watchful vigil in the quiet of your heart, guiding you onward in the Tao. The path stretches before you – walk it with confidence, with grace, with the spirit of the warrior ever alight.

Sources: Taoist and martial traditions path-of-dao-qigong.chshambhala.com path-of-dao-qigong.chen.wikipedia.org shenyun.org inform the themes and practices of this work.