

Ice and Fire Stav Self-protection Programme

Module 8– Five Principles, or Strategies, of Stav

Contents

Introduction	1
The Story of Rig the Walker	1
Interpreting the Five Principles	3
How the principles play out in real life	6
Conclusion	7
Exercises for Module 8	7
Contact Details	7

Introduction

Welcome to the eighth module of the Martial Programme. In this unit we will consider the importance of the Five Principles of Stav. I suppose there is an argument that I should have brought these principles in much earlier if they are so important. On the other hand there is nothing to stop you going back and re-reading the earlier modules in the light of what you are going to learn in this one. Indeed, I hope that this is what you will do.

As you may have noticed I like to start each module with a little story, this one begins with the tale from Norse Mythology which tells us how the classes of men, and thus the principles, were created. It may seem like a simple tale but it has a lot of implications for how society works, how people treat one another, and provides a model for strategic thinking.

Rig the Walker

One day Heimdall found himself relieved of his duties as watchman of the bridge and given a new assignment.

‘Go to Midgard;’ instructed Odin. ‘And create classes of men who will advance the human race and provide a breed of warriors to fight along side us at the terrible day of Ragnarok.’

Ice and Fire Stav Self-protection Programme – Module 8

‘How should I go about this task Father?’ Asked a slightly puzzled Heimdal, excited by a fresh challenge but unsure of how to approach his task.

‘You are an Æsir, you work it out.’ Said Odin, a little impatiently, anxious to get back to his high seat from which he could observe all that happens throughout the nine worlds.

So, Heimdal dressed in simple travellers clothes, took a stout staff and adopted the name Rig. Then he crossed from his home to Midgard, our world, and began his wanderings.

As Rig’s first day of walking came to an end, an opportunity to fulfil his mission became apparent. He came upon a humble dwelling with a poor man and woman who kept pigs and grew what they could. Rig asked for hospitality. He stayed three nights, sleeping between the man and the woman each night. He taught them many helpful things and once he had moved on, the woman found herself pregnant. She named her son Trel and he was the first peasant, living by hard manual labour and keeping pigs. As Rig continued his journey he realised that for the sake of his comfort and to fulfill his mission, he needed a better class of home for his next stay. Before the next nightfall Rig came to a well built farm house. There were cattle, chickens, geese, goats and sheep in the yard and field. The man was strong and hard working, his wife well dressed, resourceful at the spinning wheel, in the dairy, and in the kitchen and wore a ring on her finger. Again Rig asked for hospitality, stayed three nights and slept between the man and the woman. He again taught the couple many useful things and once again the woman found she was pregnant. She called her son Karl and he was the first freeman and a farmer. His children built barns, houses and halls, made wagons, ploughs and harnesses, built ships and traded far and wide.

Rig continued his journey feeling more confident in his sense of purpose. That evening he came to a large house. Both the man and the woman had fine features and had clothes of the highest quality. The woman was weaving fine linen cloth, the man twisting a string for an Elm bow. Rig was graciously accommodated in response to his request for hospitality. Again, he stayed three nights, slept between the man and the woman. He taught them both much that was of great value and moved on. When the son was born he was named

Jarl. He grew up to ride horses, shoot a bow, wield an axe, sword and spear, command a ship and lead brave men into battle.

When Jarl was coming up to thirteen years of age Heimdal was granted another leave of absence. Once more he took on the guise of Rig the Traveler, returned to Midgard and taught his son many things including knowledge of the runes.

When Jarl was a little older still, Rig was happy to give his blessing to the young man's marriage to a girl called Erna. Her father was Herse or warrior. Their son was to be called Kong and he became a great warrior and the first king of Denmark.

Interpreting the Five Principles

In Stav we talk about the Five principles, and we generally have five drills with each weapon which express five different ways of fighting. However, as you may have noticed, the story only has three sons of Heimdal, so why five principles? The answer is that there are only three principles really. The Trel or slave who is dependent upon others. The Karl or Freeman who holds property and his or her own 'means of production'. The Jarl, or Lord, who is a the warrior leader, judge, lawgiver and priest. The Jarl, or warrior, principle then subdivides, as indicated by Jarl's marriage and child in the story, into Chieftain or warrior who fights for the Lord, and Konge or King who provides a figurehead for the whole community. All five principles are interdependent and together they create a functioning society and individuals may well fulfil several, or even all, of these roles at different points in a lifetime.

This topic could lead us to a sociological discussion on the nature of society and how it functions. This is certainly worth investigating elsewhere. Our concern in this programme is how the Five Principles provide us with strategies for combat and conflict resolution. In module 7 we looked at tactical ways of dealing with hostile encounters. So, for example, a tactic for escaping from a hostile situation might be to create a distraction so that your antagonist turns their attention elsewhere while you escape. A tactic for preventing unwanted entry into your premises might be to simply shut and lock the door securely. Tactics are immediate actions for current situations. The five principles also provide inspiration for tactical responses too. Indeed each drill expressing a principle in, say, the axe training is practising a tactical response to an attack using a combination of AIM (action, intention and movement).

Ice and Fire Stav Self-protection Programme – Module 8

However, if we are going to take charge of our lives in the long term we need a strategic approach to dealing with conflict. If a tactic is an immediate response to a situation then a strategy is the long term plan for changing the situation to suit our needs and create the kind of world we want to live in. Simply avoiding conflict and keeping out of the way of aggressive people is a perfectly valid strategy inspired by the Trel principle. Of course, just making up your mind that a certain thing will or will not happen, is not the same as making it so. Action and movement will still be required to realise intention. Tactical action and movement is still required to fulfil a strategic goal. This is where a third element comes in which does not have as clear a label as ‘tactical’ or ‘strategic’. We will use the term ‘Operational Method’ to describe the process of applying the appropriate tactics to fulfil a specific strategic goal.

This may all sound a bit cerebral for dealing with self-defence situations but stick with me here. Suppose you live in an area where there are numerous pubs and clubs where violence regularly occurs. You decide that your strategy is to perfect a bar fighting method with lots of real life practice? In that case practising Yoga, Tai Chi and traditional Aikido and becoming teetotal are not tactics which will serve that particular strategy. Training hard in boxing and Muay Thai and then perhaps even working as a doorman in the roughest clubs and pubs probably would serve your desire to learn about real street violence. (I would also strongly recommend reading ‘Watch My Back’ by Geoff Thompson before you embark on such a path. Just so you know what you are letting yourself in for.)

However, if your strategy is to achieve a quite and blameless life then associate with civilised people, keep your energy clear and peaceful (more on that in the next module), and, if you are going to go to the pub, research the establishments which have the best reputation for a pleasant and well behaved clientèle.

The same applies on the Karl level. If you find yourself needing to prevent a forced entry then the tactical response was described in Module 7. Simultaneously avoid the attack, neutralise any weapon and prevent forward movement by your antagonist. On a strategic level you need to decide what your priorities are. The simplest way to maximise home security is to live in a good neighbourhood. Be careful about locking up and make your home moderately secure against an opportunist intruder. Don’t leave moveable stuff lying around outside. Such temptations might attract scavengers who may then feel emboldened to force an entry into your shed, garage, vehicle or even the house. Don’t advertise when you are away and that the premises is empty. All basic common sense home security measures which will work fine in a basically good

Ice and Fire Stav Self-protection Programme – Module 8

neighbourhood. It is also a good idea to be on good terms with your neighbours, look out for their property and ask them to do the same for yours.

What if you do decide to live and work in a rough area of town? Or you may live in the countryside where isolated properties are often hit by crime because of the remote location and lack of witnesses? In this case the strategy is different, let's assume that you need to operate a business in a relatively dangerous location. Hessle, basically a suburb of Hull, is not a bad location by any means. However there have been instances of ram raiding (where a stolen vehicle is driven through the doors and windows of a shop or other commercial premises with the intention of robbing it.) There is a very large fishing tackle emporium in Hessle which was ram raided soon after it opened. The building now has a substantial steel structure with strong roller doors across the entrance which are securely shut up at night. At the edge of the adjacent pavement are a series of massive steel posts, set deep into the ground about a metre high and the same apart. Almost all the rest of the building is brick walls at least four metres high. The owner obviously has a strategic interest in doing business in that particular building at that location. The shutters and posts are simply tactics which serve the strategy rather well. I will leave the Karl approach here. If you have need of advice the police should be willing to advise you and there are plenty of security companies who can sell you all kinds of tactics for maximising the security of a premises.

On a Jarl level the strategic objective will be to control and change society for a specific purpose. We have all seen the movies where the tough guy (in the days when I watched such films these characters were often played by Arnie Schwarzenegger, Chuck Norris, Jean-Claud Van Dam or Sly Stallone) finds himself living in a rough part of town. Something terrible happens to the hero's loved ones and so he cleans up the bad guys. All very entertaining and satisfying, but that is Hollywood, not real life.

In the real world there are a whole range of tactics which will improve, or at least manage, a rough neighbourhood. Getting into random fights and beating the local bad guys to a pulp should not be top of your list. Remember that Jarl means Lord or leader of men. A good move might be running for the local council and seeing what influence you can have there. Join, or start up, a neighbourhood watch scheme. On a more Herse level become a special constable and make a contribution that way. Again, there are a great many ways to contribute to your community and make it a better place. The best strategy will always look to create a sense of community and

give everyone a sense that they can play their part if they want to. Also, bear in mind that the 80/20 principle suggests that, even in the worst neighbourhoods, the majority of problems will be created by a very small proportion of the local population. If those individuals are identified, and their activities and influence carefully monitored, then the amount of harm they can do can be reduced to a minimum too.

How does this play out in your life?

There are aspects of our lives where we have little or no influence or power and that is when we are in a Trel role. A good example of this situation is when we are a visitor to a foreign country. Hopefully we will be well treated and welcomed as a visitor but we have little or no power when we are not even citizens of such a place. Our strategy on these occasions should be to cause as little trouble as possible and attract as little attention as possible. If a difficult situation does arise then simply leave at the first opportunity. You may or may not have certain rights in a difficult situation but remember that you will be relying on someone else to also recognise those rights and be prepared to respond accordingly. Good tactics are to familiarise yourself with the local culture, find out where and who to avoid and keep your passport, money and tickets as safe as possible. It is also a good idea to know how to get hold of the consulate should the worst happen.

The Karl principle relates to property, money and the means of doing business. Security is all very well as a general concept. Are you clear where your security really lies? In the story of the Otter's Ransom Loki is sent to find enough gold to cover an otter skin. The trickster knew of a dwarf called Andvari who lived under a waterfall and could change himself into a fish at will. Andvari also had a great deal of gold which Loki forced the dwarf to give up by catching him as a fish and refusing to let him go. Andvari wasn't all that bothered about the gold as he had a magic ring which meant he could always create more gold and start again. Loki took everything and then demanded the ring too which Andvari cursed before having it forcefully taken from him. Andvari was left with nothing although he had done nothing wrong and the family which received the ring suffered generations of bad luck due to the curse. The more you have, the more others will want it. The important thing to guard is the means to create the wealth you need, but don't be too anxious about hanging onto it. Find and read the story of the Otter's Ransom, it is quite instructive about how to manage a difficult situation on the Karl level.

Ice and Fire Stav Self-protection Programme – Module 8

On the Jarl level the best strategy is to involve yourself in your community and do you best to have a positive influence and set a good example. Read the Havamal for advice on how to behave and speak so that your standing and reputation is enhanced rather than diminished.

Conclusion

So, does martial arts have any part to play making a better community? Being a teacher of martial arts may well enable you to influence others for the better. A martial arts instructor can be an important role model for the young and help to maintain the confidence and well being of older people too.

Perhaps though, it is just the confidence which comes through serious training which will enable you to stand up and speak up for what is right when others might be afraid to do so. So, training is important for how it develops you as a person, not so much for what it enables you to do to others.

Exercises for Module 8

The video for this module is a demonstration of using the five principles for knife defence. They are effective tactics for self-defence. These drills are also a good way of grasping the meaning of the principles so that you can begin to apply them strategically as well.

Next Time

In the last module next week we will consider the Ethical bind rune and what that can teach us about the right use of force.

Contact

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