

# STAFF EXERCISES

AS USED IN ICE AND FIRE STAV TRAINING

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**Disclaimer:** Training with these exercises is undertaken at your own risk. The full benefits of these exercises is unlikely to be achieved without actual tuition with an experienced instructor. If you have any doubts as to your fitness to train with these exercises please consult your physician first.



# An Introduction to Ice and Fire Staff Exercises

Ten years ago at a Saturday course in Oxford a group of us found ourselves discussing how we might make training more accessible to beginners. Training with weapons does make it possible to see and use the lines of the web but you have to have a starting point. For two or three years before my main practice and thus the practice I tended to teach my students involved axe training. This is effective for learning how to see lines but it doesn't develop much flexibility or co-ordination. It is also a difficult concept for a lot of complete beginners to grasp.

So we discussed the possibility of creating a simple staff training system as a foundation training for beginners and as a warm-up and continuation practice for more advanced students. We went around in circle and suggested exercises which could be associated with each stance. Some of these we have been using ever since, some developed into radically different techniques. After nearly ten years of working with these exercises I am convinced that they provide a sound foundation for Stav martial training and, in their basic form, a good fitness training system too.

This manual is in three parts, the first part deals with the basic staff exercises for which there is one for each stance. This should make it relatively easy to remember them. Although a few, such as the ones associated with  $\text{Y}$  (fe),  $\text{X}$  (hagl) and  $\text{B}$  (bjork), have direct martial applications, the basic set can be used simply as exercises.

The second part covers the advanced exercises which all have direct martial applications and this is explained in more detail on page 18.

The Third part shows the positions of the nine guards. However I do not believe it is possible to learn how to make effective use of these without expert instruction so these are shown for interest only.

Some points to note:

You will need a staff. It should be long enough to reach your shoulder from the floor. Be not more than 25mm and not less than 20mm in diameter. It should be made of hard, non-splintering wood and smoothly finished. Oak is particularly suitable but a good quality heavy duty broom handle will do fine to start with.

Keep very relaxed when doing these exercises and pay particular attention to your posture and breathing.

Pay attention to your body, what the staff does is an expression of the actions of the body, so learn from the feedback the staff gives you and don't fight it.

Be patient, the real benefits of a sophisticated exercise system take a long time to fully emerge, probably years and require dedicated and regular practice in between.

Graham Butcher December 2006

# Basic Staff Exercises

## Basic Grips

There are two basic grips for holding the staff. The **As** grip seen on the left, where the staff is actually held in the lower three fingers and the back hand has the base of the staff pushing into the heel of the palm. The **Thor** grip on the right has the front hand reversed and the staff is supported quite loosely by the finger and thumb, the back hand is essentially the same as for the As grip.



## Fe Exercise

Beginning in the As grip, slide the staff back through the front hand into the Tyr position, raise the staff over the head and project it forward but keep the arms high into the Fe position. Then, keeping the arms straight rotate the arms down to the As position. Repeat 6 times on each side.



## Ur Exercise

Beginning in a neutral position lean forward letting the weight of the staff take you towards the ground. Breath in as you do this. Then raise the staff up over the head so you lean back slightly behind your center of gravity. Breath out as you do this. Then return to the ready position.

Repeat six times.



## ▷ Thor Exercise

Hold the staff in a thor grip with the back hand against the hip. Raise and lower the staff from floor to eye height using the elbow and shoulder. Repeat six times on each side.



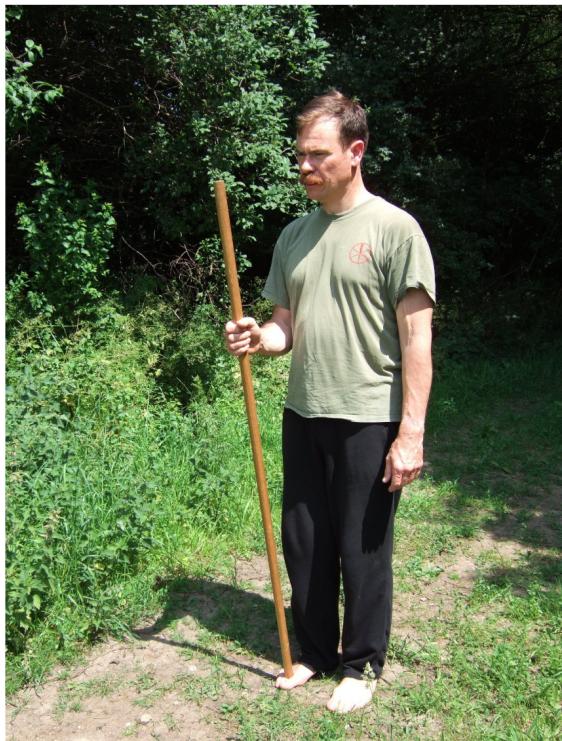
## ↖ As Exercise

Hold the staff in an As grip with just the front hand. Make sure the staff is held with just the lower three fingers, keep thumb and index finger relaxed. Raise and lower the staff from floor to eye height without flexing the wrist. Repeat six times on each side.



## Rei Exercise

Hold the staff in the right hand at solar plexus height, put the end of the staff on top of the right foot. Raise and lower the Staff in line with the centre of the body. Repeat six times on each side.



## Kreft Exercise

Hold the staff in both hands in line with the navel. Raise the staff right over the head and down the centre of the back while standing up on the balls of the feet. Breath in as you go into this position, breath out as you return to the ready position. Repeat three times on each side.



## >X Hagl Exercise

Hold the staff in the Fe  position. Step forward with the back foot rotating the hips and bringing the arms through about 270 degrees to a high Hagl  position on the other side. Breath in as you go forward, breath out as you return to the ready position. Repeat six times on each side.



## ✗ Nod Exercise

Find balance point on the staff with the thumb. Then hold the staff in the right hand. Raise staff out to the side and hold it just above head height. Rotate Staff slowly and deliberately through 180 degrees twelve times.



## | Is Exercise

Hold the staff in front of the body. Then raise staff as high as possible going up onto the balls of the feet. Breath in as you go up, out as you come down. Repeat three times.



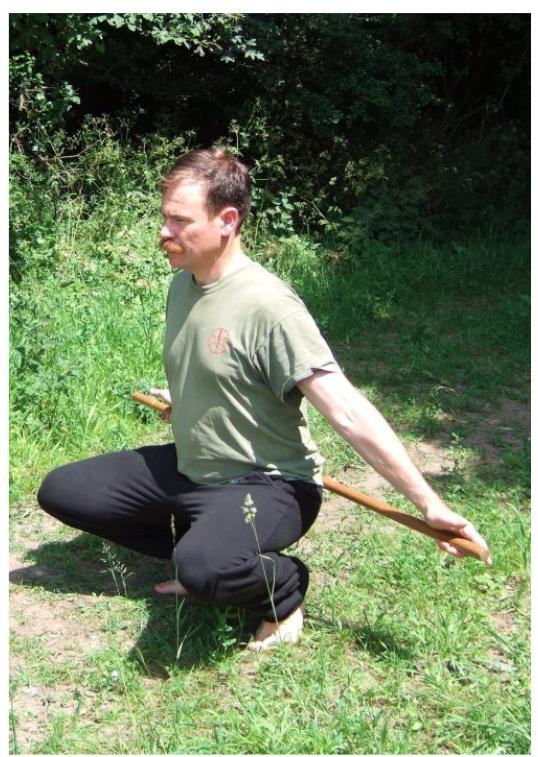
## X Ar Exercise

Find balance point on the staff with the thumb. Then hold the staff in the left hand. Raise staff out to the side and hold it just above head height. Rotate Staff slowly and deliberately through 180 degrees twelve times.



## ↳ Sol Exercise

There are two versions of this exercise. For relative beginners or those with weak knees hold the staff in front of the body and slide the hands up and down. Use the staff for balance and to help in case of difficulty. For more advanced students when knees have strengthened place staff across the small of the back. In both cases feet should be spread from each other at an angle, heels should be a fist width apart and the weight is taken on the balls of the feet. Repeat six times.



## ↑ Tyr Exercise

Hold the staff in the Tyr position and bend the body to the side so that the staff comes vertical and the body stretches to the side. Repeat six times to each side.



## Þ Bjork Exercise

Hold the staff in the Mann position in front of the forehead. Pivot the right foot outwards on the ball of the foot and take the weight fully on the right leg. As you do this bring the right hand down so that the staff is vertical in front of the body

Repeat six times on each side.



## ◊ Mann Exercise

Hold the staff behind the head with the elbows behind the staff. Twist to the left and let the trailing foot lift from the ground. Repeat six times in each direction. Note: If you don't have the flexibility to put elbows behind staff then just hold staff above or behind the head depending upon what is comfortable.



# ↑ Laug Exercise

Hold the staff in the laug stance and spin the staff 20 times one way and then 20 times the other. Try to use on the fingers and wrists to spin the Staff.



# Yr Exercise

Hold the staff under the buttocks as if sitting on a swing. Lean forward lifting the staff up over the shoulders. Then swing staff back under the legs and roll backwards as far as you can without losing balance. Return to ready position. Repeat six times.



## Advanced Staff Exercises

These advanced exercises provide the basis for martial training. There are two straight down strikes, one with the Thor ▷ and one with the As ↗ grip and two angle strikes, again one with each grip. Then there are two thrusts, one to the centre of the body using Tyr ↑ and to the eyeline using Mann ♦.

It is best to see them as training exercises for developing essential skills and co-ordination rather than necessarily combat techniques in their own right. The actual benefit of working with them will become fully apparent when working with the five two person drills and the nine guards which are the subject of a separate manual and are best learned with a teacher.

Obviously care needs to be taken in training both in avoiding injuring oneself or your trainng partners or the environment.

You may also want to improve you skill with target practice.

For the thrusting techniques a ring hung at the appropriate height is useful. (At solar plexus height for the Tyr exercise and at face height for the Mann exercise.

For strikes, a good way is to use the tip of your training partner's staff. However when you use a target practice placing the staff and then tap, rather than just hitting it as hard as you can. The aim in training is to develop focus and control not just the ability to hit things.

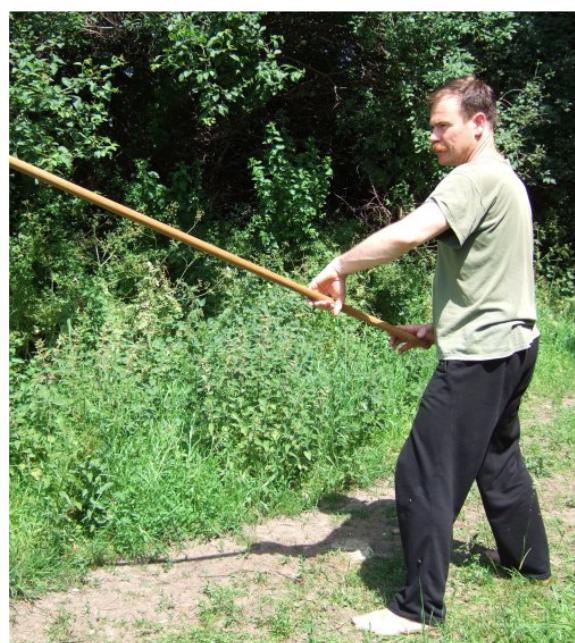
If you find the tip of the staff is not arriving where it should do cultivate the habbit of moving the alignment of the whole body to find the correct position, don't reach with the arms.

Please note that there are two basic ways of using a pole weapon. One way is to use the staff on the basis that both ends are the same and simply reversing the weapon for each strike. (This principle is used in traditional Jo training for example.) The other principle is "one end for holding and one end for striking" which makes it easier to use weapons of different lenght or with a point or blade at one end, such as an axe, spear or halberd type weapon. Since these exercises are training techniques for learning the basics of Stav martial training rather than combat techniques in their own right they should be practiced with this latter principle in mind. That said, the Nod ↖ exercise can be done with both principles and and the Mann ♦ exercise does involve reversing the weapon.

Practice regularly and learn from the feed back your body and the staff gives you.

## ▷ Thor Strike

Start in the rat-tail guard holding the staff in a Thor ▷ grip. Twist the hips to bring the staff over as near vertically as possible. Freeze staff at your own eye height momentarily and then release front hand and allow staff to carry on until it is in the rat tail position on the other side of the body from your starting position. Switch your hands around and continue.



## ↖ As Strike

Begin in the Ar ↗ position (see page 22 ) and raise staff above the head. Front arm should be bent at 90 degrees at the elbow and cocked out to the side so as not to block the view forwards. The back hand should be behind the head so the body is side ways on to the direction of striking. The back hand should be open with the staff resting in the palm of the hand and the fingers pointing along the line of the staff. Pivot forward and strike centrally to your own eye height. Catch the staff with the lower three fingers in the As ↖ position. Flip staff over by pushing down with the back hand and releasing and recover staff into the Ar ↗ position and continue from the other side.



## ↖ Nod Strike

Start with a wider stance, hips about 45 degrees to the line of advance and hold the staff on the front thigh and across the stomach. The back hand should be at about head height and in a Thor ↗ grip. Step forward and push both arms out to the front so the staff strikes forward on an angle. Recover the staff by drawing it back to the ready postion on the other side. Staff can also be recovered by releasing back hand and allowing the staff to continue around until it is caught again by the back hand. (This uses the one end holding and one end for business principle.)



## Ar Strike

Body is sideways on to the line of strike. Staff is held tight to the stomach on the navel. Front hand should be open with elbow tucked in so staff is held between inside of fore arm and the thumb. Back hand cradles the staff at the back with palm up. Pivot forward to strike around the front hand into an As  position. Flip staff back with the back hand so it comes over and is caught with the back hand back into the ready position on the opposite side.



## ↑ Tyr Thrust

This is a dual purpose movement. It provides a powerful thrusting movement with the staff which translates well to a spear thrust. But it is also the basis for a recovery technique should someone grab the end of your staff. Hence you should move from the As ↓ position to the Tyr ↑ position by walking up the staff by stepping the back foot inside the front foot and then thrusting and stepping into As ↓ again. Do not draw the Staff back, rather the staff is motionless as the body moves forward and moves when you thrust into As ↓.



## Φ Mann Strike

Start holding staff in Mann Φ but looking over the outside of the front fore arm along the line of the strike. The backs of the fingers of both hands should be in contact with the side of the head, just above the ear. The front hand stays in contact with the side of the head and allows the staff to slip through while the other hand draws the staff back as far as you can reach. Then pivot the body around 180 degrees as you step forward and bring the staff up and under without losing contact with the side of the head. The finish position is the mirror of the start position.



# The Nine Guards with the Staff

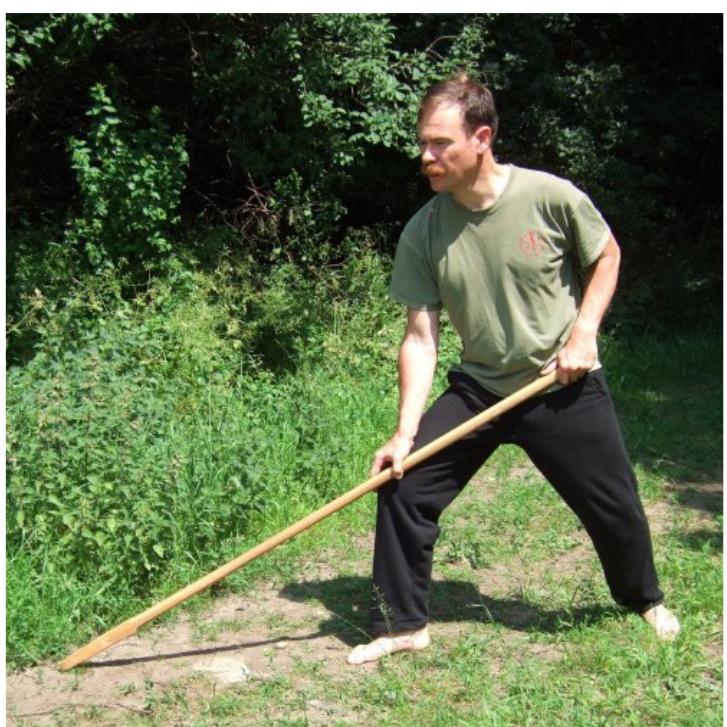
The next stage of training with the staff is to apply the skills learned from the exercises previously described using the nine guard positions. It is not really possible to learn how to use these effectively without an experienced instructor and competent training partner.

However it would be useful to familiarise yourself with the basic positions before attending courses and classes so the illustrations are included for this purpose.

## Low Left Guard



## Low Right Guard



## Rat Tail Right Guard



## Rat Tail Left Guard



## Middle Right Guard



## Middle Left Guard



## High Right Guard



## High Left Guard



## High Center Guard



# Notes