

Transcript Episode 1: Introductions

[start tune]

0:12 Jens

Welcome to The Wyrd Thing Podcast, Episode 1: Introductions. In this first episode we're introducing ourselves, we give you a bit of background about this website and this podcast project, and we give you a short preview of the next episodes to follow. For the introductions, Frigga, would you please start introducing yourself?

0:34 Frigga

Yeah, thanks. My name is Frigga Asraaf. I think, within heathen circles, my name is not that unknown. I was born and raised in the Netherlands. I'm a Germanic heathen now for nearly 30 years, which means actually half of my life by now. I am co-founder of the blot group Het Rad. That was 24 years ago this year, and I am the founder of the Flame of Frith, a prayer circle for peace. Yeah, I am an earth activist, a painter, a writer, a ritual facilitator. I have a deep love for music. I think a lot of people know my power-and-soul songs. And since 1994, multiple physical disorders led to an invisible disability and incapacity for work. I think, that's enough for now.

1:29 Jens

OK. Jochem?

1:31 Jochem

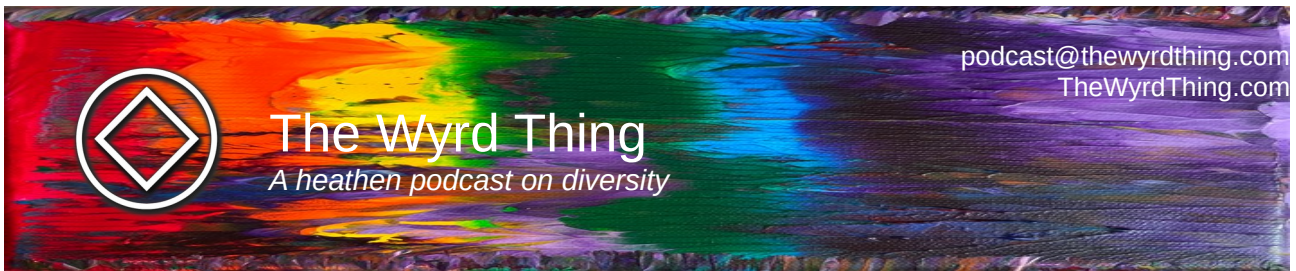
Yeah, Hello. Well, my name is Jochem, obviously. I'm a Dutch, queer pagan. I have been involved in disability... activism is the word, I was looking for the right word. I have been involved in disability activism for, oi, 20-plus years now I think. And in trans activism for about 15 years. And I have combined those because living on the intersection of multiple minorities – well, let's say it's an interesting life. And I have been a pagan for a lot less years than this. I think about 10 years.

I don't follow a specific path. So I am the only one here who isn't a heathen. But yeah, I read about several pagan traditions and take some from this and some from that. That's it for now, thank you.

2:51 Jens

OK, then I will proceed. My name is Jens. I am from the North of Germany, but for about 2 years now, I live in the Rhineland, moved to my partner and now husband here. Important aspects of my personality are that I am gay, obviously. I am computer scientist and I am a heathen.

I realized that I am gay in my late teens, then I became a computer scientist and about 10 years ago I discovered that I am heathen. Being a heathen and being a computer scientist matches maybe surprisingly well for many people. Because computer sciences is a lot about problems you can't solve which, if you look at it a bit deeper, it's just a version of the well-known omnipotence para... paradoc...? Paradox, in English. So that always went well together. Whereas being gay and being a heathen has been separated for quite a long time. It didn't really match. It didn't stop me, on the one hand or the other, but it also wasn't joined. So I had a bit of an issue being in my



spirituality with my whole person. And I am trying to change this now. Yeah, I am less of an activist than the others but I am very thrilled to be here. Suzanne, would you please proceed?

4:24 Suzanne

Thank you. I'm Suzanne. I'm a queer heathen from the middle of the UK, about as far from the sea as you can get. I'm married to the lovely Kate. And together, we do another podcast called Frithcast. I've been a heathen for 25 years, I think. So, yeah, I am really glad to be here and to be a part of this project.

04:54 Jens

OK, Rich, you're missing by now.

04:56 Rich

Yes, indeed. Thank you very much for that. My name is Rich Blackett. I'm the chair of Asatru UK, the largest inclusive heathen organization in the United Kingdom, and I've been a heathen for about 6 or 7 years now. I'm also involved with the Pagan Federation and one or two other sort of groups. I would say I am the token cis het white guy on this podcast. But that's fine. Because I am helping out with the technology and stuff like that. I was invited to be part of this by Frigga, and hopefully I can ask helpful questions without being too invasive. Leave it at that.

05:39 Jens

OK, that's all about you, Rich?

05:41 Rich

Mm-hm.

05:43 Jens

After we have an idea who we are now, Frigga, would you please explain to us why you are doing this podcast?

05:54 Frigga

One of the reasons for me of making this podcast is that I really missed a platform for dialogue on inclusivity and diversity amongst heathens. The road to get here for me was that I had and have my concerns if individuals, individual heathens, but even more groups and organizations, some of them I have been part of for many years, actually understand the meaning of being inclusive. In spring of 19-, no, 2019, I ended up within Extinction Rebellion, a social, political climate movement. And it was within XR that I really began to understand what being inclusive means. And I saw glimpses of the width and depth of it. Due to experience on this subject within both heathen circles and XR, it occurred to me that claiming to be inclusive asks for a long life commitment of being educated and educate yourself, and to stop talking and start listening. That last may sound a bit strange when making a podcast is lot of talking. It's also a lot of listening. This all has been on my mind for a couple of years. And, well, somewhere beginning of this year the word „podcast“ popped up in my mind.



Instead of going into this at „Ah, I never made a podcast, I have no clue how to do it“, I thought, well, I invite a couple of friends for a talk about, it and, yeah, well, here we are with the five of us. And we set off on this journey - The Wyrd Thing podcast.

07:57 Jens

Thank you, Frigga. Jochem, why did you join us here?

08:00 Jochem

Well, Frigga and I were talking, as we do a lot. And she came with this idea for a podcast. And it sounded great. I think, well, I was providing workshops on disability in pagan communities and I noticed that a couple of people were quite willing but had no clue how to be more accessible. Or sometimes people never thought about it because it never was an issue before. I believe that these kinds of things start with information and start with knowledge. So people can hear about it, can learn about it, can make their own opinions about it or just existing opinions. And one of the things I noticed giving these workshops is that people a lot of the time think that it is very difficult to be more accessible and that it is really expensive. And both aren't true most of the time. Of course, there are things that are very expensive or elaborate. Most of the things that people need are the little things that are quite easy to do. If only people knew about them. So, talking with Frigga, as always, talking turned into brainstorming, turned into wild ideas. And, yeah, that's how I got involved.

10:06 Jens

Yes, thank you, Jochem. Let's have a look over the Channel. Suzanne, why did you join us?

10:12 Suzanne

I think I joined and I wanted to be part of this project, it goes back to something you said earlier, Jens, and you also mentioned, Jochem, about having multiple parts of our identities that we can't maybe acknowledge all of them at the same time. And so I saw The Wyrd Thing as a way to explore those in modern inclusive heathenry and look at those intersections between parts of our identities so we can bring our whole selves into our faith and we can bring our faith into our whole selves. That's why I was really interested in joining these episodes and exploring these topics.

11:03 Jens

Okay, let's stay on the island over there. Rich?

11:05 Rich

Thank you, Jens. The reason I wanted to get involved with the podcast, not just because I was asked by Frigga, is that as I'm head of an organization, it's important to me to be aware of what inclusivity really means as opposed to paying lip service to it, and how to do that in a way to help people and bring them into the organization. Heathenry, which has, as we all know, some bad reputation about the way it treats people who aren't straight white men, shall we say. So, how to do that and learning about that and having those discussions and hearing other peoples views is something I am very interested in doing. And if I can contribute as well, I am happy to do that, too.



11:52 Jens

Thank you, Rich. So for me, when Frigga asked me several months ago, it was a strange idea to me to do a podcast but at the very same time it somehow resonated within me. One thing was that inclusivity became quite a buzzword in heathenry or in parts of heathenry a few years ago. And I think there is absolutely nothing wrong with it. It's a good idea, but it remained an idea in my opinion. I had the feeling it's not filled with life and we need to add some substance to it. And at the same time I asked myself, „What can I do to be more inclusive?“, to include myself completely, as we said before, but also to be inclusive to other people. I had some experiences where I realized we are not very inclusive to people with disabilities sometimes just by the way we choose our locations because they're so picturesque and lovely and medieval and lots of stairs and narrow steps and stuff like that. So I thought it's a great opportunity to explore this topic. To go on a journey and have a look and learn what does inclusivity really mean. So, now we're all gathered here and have heard a few things. Rich, would you like to say us something about the name of the podcast?

13:18 Rich

Yeah, Sure. The Wyrd Thing, that's W Y R D, the old english spelling of weird, which is to do with fate and all those sorts of concepts, and we thought that was a nice way of bringing in the heathen aspect of it. But also because people who are not from cis het white groups are seen as being weird, and they shouldn't be. So part of this is exploring how to resolve that within heathenry. So the Wyrd Thing is: Yes, it's Wyrd, but it's not weird. If that makes sense. It's a nice play on words. I can't remember which one of us came up with that, but it was just something which seems to stick and it felt more and more right the more we used it.

14:10 Jens

Yeah, I don't remember who came up with it, either. But we agreed quite easy on it then. We also agreed on the logo created by Suzanne. So because you created it, Suzanne, would you please tell us something about it?

14:24 Suzanne

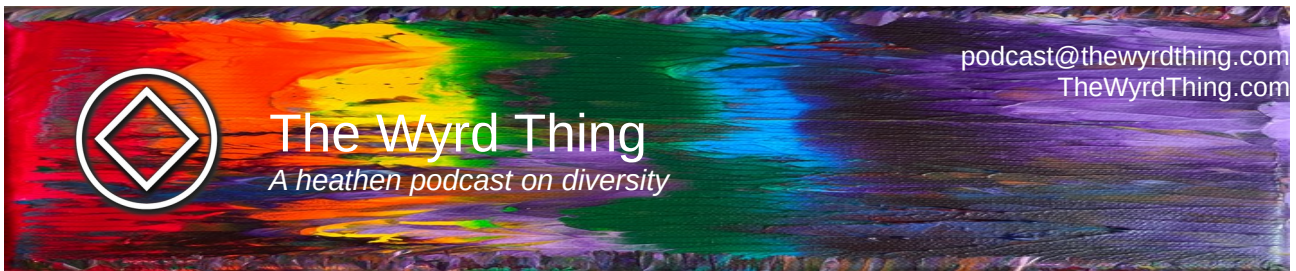
Yes, Sure. So the logo that we have, the central part, the diamond, is one of the runes, so it's the Ing rune. And that can signify travelling, journeys, new beginnings. But also inside the circle, so everybody around that is in an equal place, has an equal voice, has an equal right to be heard.

14:52 Jens

Thank you, Suzanne. Frigga, I think it's time you tell us a bit about your motivations and what you always wanted to say in this first episode here.

15:03 Frigga

Wow, what a question. Well, to me, as a Germanic heathen, it is obvious to me to name frith and inclusivity in one breath. And frith is about society, about community. Frith to me is about the way we interact with the world around us and with each other. In a way that is safe and beneficial for all. I really have... I mean, talking about frith and inclusivity in a short way is hard, not to do. But we have many episodes to come. But what I wanted to say is that I'm really glad that we took our time to grow into The Wyrd Thing podcast. And we already had very meaningful discussions, which



brought a lot to me, since we started to explore the idea of this podcast, as I said at the beginning of this year.

And talking with you guys, whether it was in our meetings or during recordings, we already did some, sometimes I just grew silent and humble. Humble that some of you are willing to share your life experiences which are not always that easy. And I think that it is important, and that is the listening part, and learning part, and become-aware part which has been said by us in various ways, is that suddenly you hear what it is to be L T B – and the rest, oh gosh, my foggy brains! And that's to one of the things about inclusivity is foggy brains and all this different kinds of neurodiversity. Yeah, that already was there, the feeling safe to just show I have foggy brains with you guys, means a lot to me. So I am looking forward to what this whole project is going to bring us. And I hope also with guests and I hope also for the listeners.

17:22 Jens

Okay, Frigga. I think it is time for me now to comment on our name as well but also to say why the Wyrd is so important to me and why I like this name so very much. Wyrd is, as the heathens between us surely know, one of the norms. But in modern heathenry it's much more. For me it's one of the trademark concepts of modern heathenry. And it's not fate, it's not complete predestination. It's also not karma. It's somewhere in between that with a nordic heathen twist to it. It's often shown in modern heathenry as a web. Which is the very pagan idea of everything is connected to everything. So in a way, quite a pagan stereotype. And within this web, we are bound to it. We cannot completely change the circumstances of our life. But we can influence it. We can pull on some strings a little bit and try to improve it. So for two different things, eh, two different reasons, the concept of Wyrd says to me that inclusivity is a good thing. The one viewpoint is that everything is connected to everything anyway. So if I am not inclusive, if I try to cut things out here, I can't destroy the net, but I damage this web. And I damage myself inside it. And heathens usually want to create a good Wyrd. That is basically the heathen idea of improving the world. So if I want to create a strong good web, I need as many different threads as possible to do it. That's not a good web if all the threads have the same size, colour, strength, whatever. I try to integrate all the different ones into it. So, from these totally different points of view, the concept of Wyrd says to me: Be inclusive. Okay, Jochem, the second part of the name is the Thing. Would you please say something about this as well?

19:33 Jochem

Well, I'll talk a bit more on what a Thing is for people who may not know that. In early Germanic society, a Thing was a governing assembly or meeting made up of the free people of the community. And Things took place at regular intervals. It's analogous to the Anglo-Saxon folk moot, that people may know. And the word Thing in this meaning is still in use, often in a modern context, especially within Germanic heathenry. And then it often means in a bit more general meaning like all kinds of gatherings. And that is what I like. I like to gather because I like to be with people. I like to do what we do now, gather and talk about interesting topics. Share our understanding of things or our opinion about things or ask questions to each other. And I also like the play of words because sometimes we are being called „thing“ by people just to insult us or to show their disgust about us. And I like to turn that around and to proudly adopt this term as our nickname. So in both meanings, to proudly wear a name that people are using to calling us names. And we consider our podcast to be a virtual place of meeting as well, which makes it a Thing.



21:32 Rich

So we have a number of topics coming up for episodes, and I'm excited to see where all that leads. One of first ones to come up is accessibility. Isn't that right, Jochem?

21:48 Jochem

Yes, indeed. We will talk about accessibility and the access needs people may have. Not only seen from the point of view of disabled people, but also queer people and possibly everyone. We will talk about the little things and the easy things that communities can provide to make groups or events much more accessible than maybe now.

22:29 Rich

Yes, I think that's all going to be very interesting to hear about. Another thing we're going to be discussing is gender and how that pertains to heathenry. Because in the past there has been very strong concepts of strong divided gender roles or gender identity. And obviously, that's really not perhaps the best way to approach things. And how that can be explored and what the heathen response to that might be, should be or indeed perhaps shouldn't be. So looking forward to that later on. Also we will be covering acronyms. Is it LGBTQIA+ or Quiltbag? It's one of my personal favourites. Suzanne, could you tell us a bit more about that?

23:14 Suzanne

Certainly. I think for me, queer heathenry, there are certainly new queer heathen academics looking at the myth cycle, looking at the sagas through a queer lens. And that raises, again it calls into question those traditional gender roles and that very traditional binary gender that heathenry is often associated with. So I think having that episode to explore maybe what it means to be a queer heathen, what it means to be an inclusive queer heathen, and how we may make our gatherings, our rituals more accessible to those that are, would be a really interesting discussion. I'm looking forward to that.

23:58 Rich

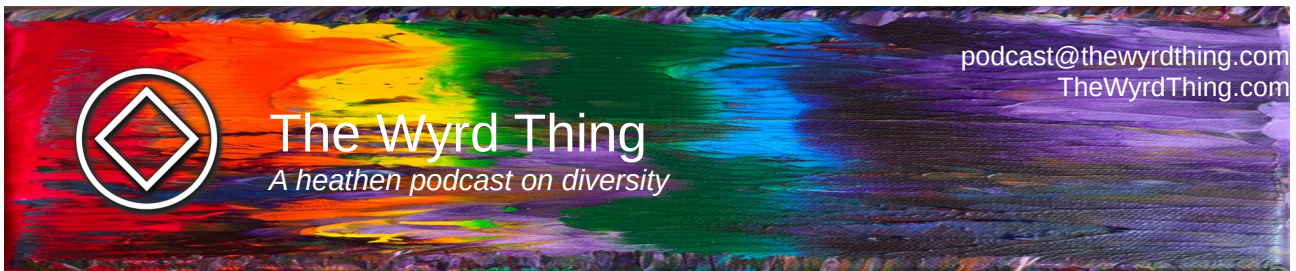
Yes, indeed. I think that will be fascinating to hear about that. Jens, we also want to... another thing we wanted to delve into is clichés.

24:07 Jens

Yes, and Suzanne just mentioned the stereotypical binary gender roles, which are almost a kind of cliché in themselves. And in that episode we will shift the focus a bit, so we have a look at clichés about heathenry on the one side and clichés about mainly queer people but also some other groups as well. And have a look at what we can actually learn from that. Because queer people are very used to clichés and I think in heathenry we can have a look at that and just learn from that experience and I am very much looking forward to that.

24:46 Rich

And the next episode, which will be Episode 2, which is just coming up, is going to be specifically about inclusivity. Frigga, I believe you'll be hosting that one?



24:57 Frigga

Yes, we will have a discussion on, indeed, inclusivity with Jens and Rich. I am looking forward to it to set off the dialogue. And I hope, many, many, many, many episodes will follow. I mean, we can't discuss inclusivity in one episode but we as said can set off. So I am looking forward to hear your thoughts on it as well. And that's I guess I said that somewhere here also before, is what I am really looking for. To hear other people talk about it. Which makes me think and look in a mirror of my own biases, where I still need to change my way of thinking where I can become more inclusive.

25:50 Rich

Thank you for that, Frigga. I think we're pretty much at the end of everything we wanted to cover for this first episode. So, it simply remains to say thank you for listening, and thanks to all of my cohosts today: Jens, Jochem, Suzanne, Frigga. And if you want to look us up online, you can find us at TheWyrDThing.com, and on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter @TheWyrDThing. Then, once again, thanks for listening.

[end tune]