

## Transcript Episode 3

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### Suzanne

Hello, welcome to The Wyrd Thing podcast episode 3: accessibility. I'm Suzanne, one of the five hosts and today Jochem and Frigga are with me to discuss accessibility in modern inclusive heathenry.

So, maybe as an opening statement, or an opening understanding of what accessibility is, could you maybe both define what you understand accessibility to be?

### Jochem

Yes. I think accessibility is a pretty broad concept. It is about making, for example, an event accessible for people who are considered to be, in some way, different. This could be a disabled person, or a poor person, or a person of colour, LGBTQI+ people, etc, etc. Because it would take us, I think, hours if we would talk about all these groups and peoples in respect to accessibility. We will limit ourselves today with.. to disabled people and accessibility for.. concerning disability.

### Suzanne

Hmm.

### Jochem

And I think to me it is in fact a very normal thing to consider. Because when you're planning an event of some kind, you are talking about accessibility needs anyway. Because you're talking about a venue that should be large enough or small enough, that's.. probably you want the venue to have toilets, and maybe you like to have a drink or to grab a bite of something. Parking spaces. Maybe it needs to be reached by public transport as well. And then it's quite easy to add other accessibility needs, like wheelchair accessibility or maybe things for people with hearing disabilities or food intolerances. It could be added quite easily when you're when you're talking about these kinds of stuff anyway.

### Suzanne

Hmm. Frigga, what are your thoughts around how you define it?

### Frigga

Ehm. Well, I think Jochem expressed it pretty well. When I was thinking about this episode, I went a little back – or a little back, almost 30 years back! When I, almost from one day to another, was bound to a wheelchair. And I couldn't move around anymore as I was used to, and then I was learning what it meant to be being disabled. And what it is not to go in the train any moment I wanted. It was still, I had to make a phone call twenty four hours before I wanted to travel, I had to make a reservation that they were willing to get me in the train and help me out of the train. And it still went wrong, often. But also small things.. Also what it is.. I had to learn to deal with what it was. And other people around me, who were used to me as being healthy, had to deal with me in a



different way. Maybe I am a bit on a sidetrack, but this is what I have in my mind. My misty brains. Sometimes I go in all kind of directions, except the proper one. So, I slowly learned what accessibility means. And I think the last couple of years, due to inclusivity, there is much more attention for it. But, as with many other things, as long as you don't have to deal with it or hardly deal with it, you're not aware of things. And you don't think about what it means to be accessible. So, I think, from both sides we have to learn. And too, as I always say, talk WITH people instead of ABOUT people. And I think that's what we want to achieve with this podcast in many ways. It's learning what it is. And as Jochem said, some things are very simple. And other things are.. You need to make it your own.

### Suzanne

Yes. I like the point you raise there about it being a very individual experience of, you know, having to adjust to what it takes to then be able to do the things you want to be able to do.

### Jochem

When I talk with people about accessibility, often people don't know what to do. It is only logical, I think, if you don't have any experience with it.

And I think.. it is good to make clear that there is no such thing as 100% accessibility. Because all people with disabilities are different. And to make a clear example: what deaf people need, is what blind people exactly don't need, and the other way round. And so, there are a lot more examples of this. And I think, that is exactly why it is important to talk with people who want to attend an event about what they need.

Also, because a lot of the times when talking about accessibility people think "Oh, yah, we should have a ramp for wheelchair users." Which is a good thing and you do need that! But it isn't *all* you need. Ehm. Or not all you may need, because you don't need to have sign language interpreters if there are no sign language users present. So, you don't have to overdo it. On the other hand, if you organise a huge event for a lot of people, then it would be a good thing to have sign language interpreters anyway.

But if you just organise a smaller event, for – I don't know – 20 people, 15, maybe 100, then you probably will have a low budget as well, and then it's much more important just to talk to people who want to attend or who you would like to invite, about what they need on access needs. And then both you can negotiate what is.. what do people need? What can you offer? And how can you meet somewhere in the middle? I think.

### Suzanne

To be able maybe, to open up that event. But, as you say, not having to look at sign language interpreters if that's something people find not useful.

### Jochem

Exactly. Yeah, yeah, so, don't think *for* people what they need. Talk *with* people about what they really need.

### Suzanne

Hmm.



### Frigga

My motto's in life in general: don't think for people. If you want to do something for somebody else, then talk with the person or persons. Because only they can tell you what they want or need. Or.

### Suzanne

Hmm. And then you'll value that individual. And say to them: yes, we want you at our festival, or yes we want you at our ritual, or we want you at that camp. How can we make that experience easier for you?

### Jochem

Yes. And at the same time you're making it more easy for yourself as well. Because you don't have to assume what might be necessary.

I am using a wheelchair part time as well. So, if you organise an event, you might assume that I need a wheelchair accessible toilet. But in fact I don't, because I can walk as well. So, you would make it much easier for yourself if you ask me: What do you need?

### Suzanne

And then being able to listen to that and understand what that kind of means. I know I have been to a pagan event a few years ago where they very happily provided disabled access toilets. And they went "Yes, we've got it! It's gonna be great. Please, come." And when we went to see the loo block the disabled access toilets was up a short set of stairs.

### Jochem

Oh, no.

### Suzanne

So, it wasn't on a flat access and it didn't have a wider door to be able to get somebody with a mobility aid or with a scooter or a wheelchair wouldn't have been able to get through the door. So yes, they technically had a loo that they marked as disabled, but it wasn't fixed for access. [laughs]

### Jochem

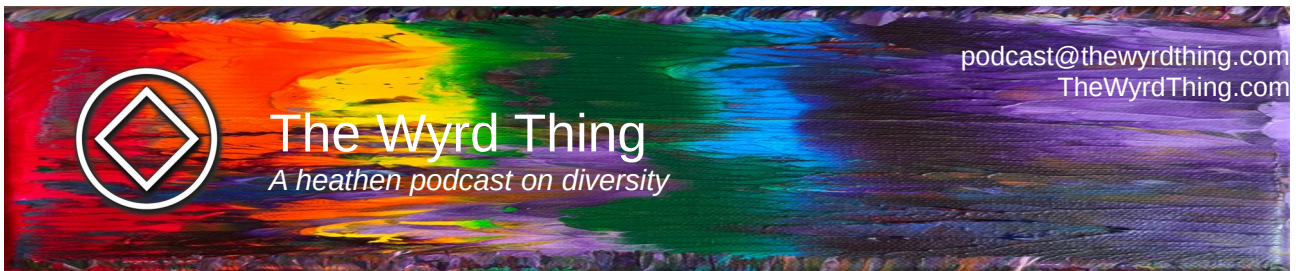
Yeah.

### Frigga

For me is important.. is that I know about the.. if talking about an event of more days where I also stay and sleep, that I know a bit about the building. Because then I can.. Because the same as Jochem, I partly need a wheelchair mobility scoot and partly I can walk. And I also learned that in various countries that what is said to be accessible can vary. And it makes, I mean, yeah, if.. I can remember one time in Germany. And on the website was the accessible logo – you know, the logo with the wheelchair. But when I got there, you know, you have there hills and mountains, so the entrance – I don't know if they called that the ground floor or the first floor – that level was accessible. But there was also a lower level, but there was no.. only a stair to the lower level. And on the lower level were all the rooms where the workshops and the lectures were.

### Suzanne

Oh!



### Frigga

Which means that I had to walk down the stairs or completely around the building. And I rather would have known that in advance. Because then there is not that disappointment when you are there: "Oh! This is going to be way more tiresome than I expected."

### Suzanne

Hmm.

### Frigga

And that are simple things. Yah. Or put that in your advertisement or point maybe out somebody, for the event, who is in charge with all kinds of things about disability that you can ask that person. But yeah, I think a lot of the organisers will just say "Oh, but it is accessible!", because it is on the website, and they will *never* thought that, you know, the difference in levels. Without an elevator, to me the building is not accessible. Sometimes not the entire building is accessible. Of course, that can be. But if it is an event with a lot of workshops, then.. And the workshops are a level lower.. That was a bit.. But I had a fun week anyhow, but yeah.

### Jochem

And that's why I think people should be explicit about what is accessible. And explain, so "The main venue is wheelchair accessible, howeve the workshop rooms aren't." Or something. Or "You have to go outside around the building". Just be explicit.

### Frigga

I mean.. When I.. Nearly 30 years ago, it was only for a couple of years, that I really need a wheelchair for almost everything. Then I was still healthy and I could move around my own wheelchair. So, if I would go around, well, if it's nice weather – but if it's constantly raining, and you have to go around the building.. You know, that's all kind of things.. It would be nice if people take it into consideration.

And of course, as I said, if you never have to deal with it, you forget these things. And that is why again, and I wil repeat that over, and over, and over again, talk with us! [laughs] Because I'm still learning.

### Suzanne

And maybe somebody's needs might change over time, or change day to day, about what they need to be able to access that.

### Jochem

Oh, yes.

### Suzanne

Yeah. Thinking about events where you're talking about, ones with workshops, and ones with ritual, or ceremony, or talks, not being accessible to you, or not as easy accessible to you. So, how much of an event if you have an event like that, or a big festival, or say a weekend, or a week long conference or something like that, how much of that event would you need to be accessible or to be recognised to.. for you to be able, or to want to, either to book a ticket or to be able to contact



the organisers to say: Can you tell me a little bit more about the access to this particular room because there's a lecture there I *definitely* want to go to?

### Jochem

Well, it's depending on the specific access need. And I have talked about my wheelchair and people often assume that is my biggest challenge. But when it comes to a day long or several days long events, my biggest need are my food [intolerances]. If I can't eat, I have a huge problem.

### Suzanne

Hmm.

### Jochem

And I am not able, and basically in fact not willing, to bring my own food, if I have a weekend long or a week long event. That would be silly. If food is included for everyone, it should be included for me as well. And of course I am more than willing to prepare some food, because I can understand that not all cookies or extra's are provided, and that isn't a problem. But the meals should take my dietary needs in consideration.

### Suzanne

Hmm.

### Jochem

And I would like an organiser to be specific about the possibilities about that, on an event page. And so, if they are not able, or willing, or whatever.. If my dietary needs aren't met, I won't consider joining that event, because I am just not able to. So, my access needs are this basic that I don't come to content even, if my access needs aren't met.

### Suzanne

Hmm.

### Frigga

The thing I look at are indeed the accessibility of the building, or the premises. And first I have to look at that: if it's possible for me.. What is possible for me? Because I need to be able to think in advance how I can get around things, because for me, it is.. I have Chronical Fatigue Syndrome – I don't like the word fatigue, because it's more being constantly exhausted and foggy brains. It's more than 'fatigue'. So I need to spread my energy. And that is one of the reasons why it is important for me to know things in advance. Because then I can have.. – How did say that? – Yeah, think about how I can deal with stuff and how I can do.. Yeah, sometimes I need to go and lay down a lot.. And so, that's the first.

And *then* I will look at what is the offer for.. What is the programme, and.. I mean, even when I was healthy, I wouldn't attend everything on the programme.

### Suzanne

Hmm.



### Frigga

And to me, yah, the willingness of people – in this case we're talking about events, it's the organisers – is that they are open and willing to listen to people. And what Jochem said, you know, you find somewhere in the middle. And maybe that is not possible, but maybe some other things are possible.

And yeah, even then, if I would have in advance, you know, okay, I want to that lecture.. And they arranged a lecture in a room that is accessible for me, I don't have to walk up the stairs, maybe that day I can't go there, because I am too tired. So, that's always.. And then I, you know, you have this feeling guilt and all that kind of things. So, it's always searching.

### Suzanne

Hmm.

### Frigga

It never will be easy.

### Suzanne

No. I can appreciate that with some of the big, like the big general pagan events, have been sort of 3 or 4 days. They often have items on the programme that are.. in fact they overlap. And that gives very little time for things like rest breaks. Or not being able to just step away, because it's too intense a social situation, and you need to just have that quiet space for half an hour, before you go back into a whole marquee full of people who are learning to drum, and it's very loud. And that cuts into your rest time and the time that you need just to recuperate to go to the next thing that you want to go to.

### Jochem

And for me that is a thing that I am willing.. I would prefer if workshops would have a decent amount of time between them. So I can have a short rest, I can have a drink, a bit of food and wind down before I go to the next [workshop]. But I understand that isn't always possible. So, that is what I said: I am prepared to just skip a workshop and get my rest, while others are doing a second workshop. So, I have a bit of energy again for the third workshop.

### Suzanne

Hmm.

### Jochem

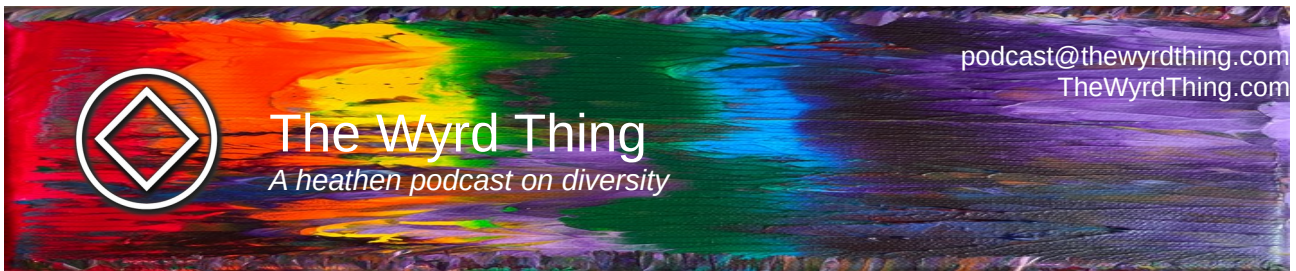
So, some things for me are really mandatory, because it's this basic access need that it has to be met, because I am not able to participate otherwise. And other stuff are not that mandatory, but it would be really nice if that would be provided.

### Suzanne

Hmm.

### Frigga

I am organising events myself. And already for a long time, I think that we often try to put way too much on the programme and way too much different things. And I think that there should way..



indeed what you said, Suzanne, should be more time in between workshops or lectures, a longer break for lunch, a longer break for evenings meals. So, there is also way more time to socialise. Because if you're only running from one workshop or lecture to another, you'll have hardly time to socialise. So I don't mind if I have to skip – yeah, sometimes I mind if I have to skip workshops, because I am just too exhausted. But often in front I like to look through the programme: okay, that one I like, that one I like, and I mostly choose only 1 or 2 a day. Besides the fact I have to mention I also often gave workshops myself, so I had to think about that as well. But yeah, slow down, relax, you're a weekend or a day away and why should we put it só full of everything.

### Suzanne

Hmm. And that sort of socialising time, that getting to know people in the community, getting to know other heathens is kind of at the heart of almost who we are as communities, and making those events accessible means that we get to be able to include more members of our community in what we do.

### Jochem

Yes, indeed.

### Suzanne

And so, yeah, maybe thinking about.. you were talking there, Frigga, about the fact that you've organised events and kept these accessibility things in mind, and given lectures at those events, and then going to other lectures as well. Giving sessions, giving workshops can be really tiring in itself. So, maybe, what are some of the things that organisers can be mindful of when they're planning events, right from sort of big, huge camping events or festivals, multi day festivals, down to maybe just even a kindred meeting in a particular space. What are some of the things organisers might want to look at being mindful of, to be able to open that event up to as many as possible?

### Frigga

I think we have been mentioning these things, already. Yeah, I'm thinking now a bit more in general – my mind is always spinning into all kinds of directions. I said before, these overcrowded programmes, and days or gatherings is – why we want that? That there is so much.. It's great, on one hand. But do we need to be entertained from 7 o'clock in the morning until 3 o'clock at night? That's something.. I mean..

[Jochem and Suzanne both laugh]

### Frigga

I think the entire world needs to slow down, not even within heathen circles, but it's something to think about. Just, you know, hanging around with each other, sitting.. And I think some people do that, on gatherings. They don't hardly go to any lectures or workshops, they may sit and talk. But I think that is something which could be more in our minds to think about.

### Jochem

Yeah. Maybe I could add: be clear about what you offer. Be clear about what do you organise, when, where, for whom, how, but also about costs and accessibility. And use a contact, that



people.. or a contact person, that people can contact, if they have questions on any of those issues. So people know what they can expect. And know that if they have questions, that it is okay to contact. So you show that it isn't weird if people would like to contact you about access needs. Because a lot of people are so used to an inaccessible world, that if you don't mention any information about accessibility, people will assume it isn't accessible. And not all people are activists, like Frigga and me. So, not everyone is willing – or has the energy left to – again, contact people about “this is what I need, can you meet those needs?”

### Suzanne

Hmm. Yah. I think that's a really important point, that if you are organising something, even if it is just a kindred meetup, if you're not putting on there “we can adapt this or we can provide accessibility”..

### Jochem

Exactly.

### Suzanne

...Then, yeah, you're right, people will assume that it's not. You'll lose those members of the community.

### Jochem

Exactly. And I have talked to people about accessibility and provided workshops on the issue. And I am surprised that a lot of people, a lot of organisers of events, think that accessibility is very, very expensive, or it is a huge burden for organisers to make an event accessible. And on the contrary, often it is just a matter of thinking about it and doing it. And it is, a lot of the time, the little details that make an event accessible, or not. Like we said, just mention one or two lines on your website about accessibility. Or just mention: “If you have any concerns about accessibility, please contact us”. And then.. that is where accessibility starts.

### Frigga

And then.. What you say, just a few lines on the website, or the flyer. That means that I am visible, and that I am there. And that already makes a lot of difference. You feel way more being part of it. And you feel way more welcome.

### Suzanne

You feel valued as an individual for the whole of who you are.

### Frigga

Yah.

### Jochem

Exactly.

### Suzanne

And not just the part that is heathen and wants to go to a ritual, but would find that challenging.





### Jochem

Yes. And the interesting thing is that a lot of the accessibility needs of people with disabilities are beneficial for everyone. Like Frigga said about having a good programme and having rests between parts.. different parts of the programme is beneficial for everyone. And I have an attack of brainfog as well, because I thought about a second thing and it's completely vanished. So, maybe it pops back at some time.

### Frigga

That's so familiar! [laughs] I was still a bit nervous and felt insecure about making a podcast, because I have that a lot of the times. And I think these are things too, to talk about, about accessibility, you know, giving people time.

No, what I wanted to say – because I have partly.. my fog was suddenly taking over – is the invisible, and then you get the neurodiversity. But also to me, and partly to you, Jochem, as well, because if you're not in your wheelchair, people can't see anything about.. the outside that I have special needs. And I can remember from long ago that I had so many remarks: But you can't see anything! I really had.. I'd wish I had a broken leg, you know, nine times broken with all these pins. It's just visible on the outside that there is something wrong and that I can't walk. And this disbelieve, and all kinds of things, makes it sometimes só hard, and makes you só small. And I also think, yah, partly a lot of things changed, but that still is.. But you can't.. it's likewise for me.. I can't see if a person is deaf or I can't see if a person has autism, or anything else, and due to that special needs. And how do you deal with that?

And you mentioned activism, I'm more an activism about climate than on this level – or maybe more than I think. I was reading about how to deal with disabled people and people with special needs, within actions. You know, when you rise up and go out in the streets. And a lot of that I find on the internet as well. And one of the things they come up with is that you wear buttons. In specific colours, so that people can, or at least some people, you know, see on that way if you are deaf or if you are.. whatever. And some people like that (the same as I), and some people no, because then you have to make visible that you have special needs. So, there's all.. kind of things to think about how do you deal with it, how.. Because I have it too, part of me.. when I go to a meeting it feels great that people don't know that I have a chronical fatigue, don't know I am disabled. And on the other hand it can be.. I wished they knew, because then they would pay little more attention to it, and stuff. So, there's always this..

### Suzanne

Yeah, and thinking about disabilities that maybe aren't as easily visible. For example, for somebody who has hearing loss on one side, it may be as simple as, if you are doing ritual, to stand them on a particular side of the main speaker. So that they can hear what is going on. And for somebody who has, maybe, needs something in large print. If they're coming to a two day festival, to have that programme in bold or in larger print, so they can have their own copy. And they're not asking someone else to read it for them, but they can have an independence about when and where they read that, and when and where.. what things they can decide they want to access.

### Jochem

Oh yes, that reminds me that a lot of the time people say "Oh, but I can do this and this, no problem at all". And that really is very kind, but then I am lacking the thing.. then I am still



dependant. So that is exactly what you said, Suzanne, I like to have my autonomy. Because in daily life, I am dependant on all kind of services, and other people, and stuff, that annoys me a lot of the time. So when I go to an heathen event, or a pagan event, I like to do myself what I am able to do myself. And when I want to, and not when it is convenient for another person to assist me. So, it would be great if people could understand that.

### Suzanne

And maybe give people the choice.

### Jochem

Yah! Because other people.. in the example you gave about large print. Maybe some short sighted people like to be read, and other people with low vision may prefer larger texts. It also is personal. I like to wheel my wheelchair myself, but other people may prefer to be pushed by other people.

### Suzanne

Hmm. So we circle back to that point that we touched on at the beginning that accessibility, people's experiences of their own disabilities are very, very personal. And what one person may need in accessibility, another one may not find that as helpful and may need another adjustment making.

### Jochem

Yah, exactly.

### Suzanne

Yeah. I think that's a really good way to sort of circling back to where we started at the beginning. Perhaps, this is a good way to sort of coming to a close of this episode about maybe organisers looking to talk to people and treating them as individuals. And not assuming that accessibility means providing a ramp, and nothing else. "Well, we're accessible, we've provided a ramp!" Well, that's good, but it might not be adaptable to everybody's access needs. [laughs]

### Jochem

[laughs] Yah, exactly.

### Suzanne

So I would like to thank you both for making some excellent points, and discussing accessibility on this episode with me. And our next episode of The Wyrđ Thing will be looking at the intersection of gender in heathen faith, and looking at how that intersection happens, what kind of things effect. If you want to look us up online, you can find us at TheWyrđThing.com, and on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter @TheWyrđThing. So, please join us all next time, for the next episode. Bye!

### Frigga

Bye.

### Jochem

Bye



[end tune]