



Transcript Episode 12: Three ways to include Hodur

[start tune]

0:10 Jens

Welcome to the Wyrd Thing Podcast, episode 12. Today I am joined by my co-host Suzanne [Suzanne: Hello!] who joined in on short notice for Frigga who is unfortunately sick today. Get well, Frigga. And we have a guest, which is Richard. Richard, would you please tell us in a few sentences about yourself?

0:35 Richard

Hello. I'm Richard. I'm 35 years old and I'm blind from birth. I became a heathen, I think as I was 15 or so. I have not been raised in a christian way of education, because my parents were not christian at all. They were it on the paper but I had no christian education. I even went to communion, but only because the other children in my school did it. And so my parents did not want me to stand out and do not take part in this.

But then there was this special moment in my life where I lost my father. He had a stroke as I was ten and then he fell into coma and he stayed in this condition for 5 years. Then he fortunately - I have to say fortunately - had the opportunity to die, because it was torture for him and for our whole family. These five years had an effect on my system of believing, and especially on what I thought about what everyone was telling me about god. I am talking about Jehova here. That he was a good one, he was a caring one, but what I experienced in my daily life was not that. That he is a caring god which brings things in order. So I looked for alternatives.

I studied various books from various belief systems. First of all, I looked for everything that was antichrist. Because I was so disillusioned about christianity. But I quickly found out that everything antichrist is just christianity with a negative predecessor. So I thought that would not be my system of believing.

And then I started to go out. I started to go out into the forests, into the meadows, along our streams where I was living. I had this experience of... it's hard to tell. This experience that the trees, the plants, the water in the stream, the water in the river was... was calling my name. Don't think I'm crazy or so. But it was an experience of a... Yes, that nature was calling me and talking to me. I could sit for hours under a tree and listen for the wind in the leaves and listen to the sounds that the river makes flowing nearby. And let's say I had a moment of awakening. Then I got some books about Asatru and some copy of the Edda, of course. And I started to read and I started to understand and I thought that's it! That's my belief. That's what was calling me.

As I grow up and started my professional training, had my first job. I somehow had my head full of other things. More wordly. Relationships. [Laughs] Going out on weekends. Party. And between my work, which consumed lots of my time. Then I realized what I had forgotten. These moments as I was younger. Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, and so. As I had time to listen to the world. To listen to the spirit in the world around me. And then I thought, okay, you had been there, you had been at this turn where you felt that the gods were calling you. And I felt that the live I was living between work and spare time was not very balanced. I was missing this spiritual component. There had to be something else.

And so I returned to my books, I returned to the Edda, I returned to the music I was listening to. Maybe you know *Carved in Stone* which is a project from, I think she is the keyboarder of the



German metal band Taunusheim. She has four albums out now with songs related to pagan mythology and Asatru and the Norse gods. And there was that moment when I got an album of her. It must have been around 2006, 2007.

And then I started to look for people which shared my belief. I was very suspicious. Because everywhere I was looking for people doing something with Norse mythology, doing something with Asatru, there were also some nazis under them. And I thought: Can this be everything? Can there only be fascists among heathens? Can there only be fascists among Asatru believers? And I was very, very sad because I was quite alone in what I thought. I was quite alone in what I felt. I was sad because I wanted to share things with people. I wanted to share opinions, points of view with people. But there was nobody in my environment.

Then at a certain moment I found the Eldaring. I think most of you knows the Eldaring quite well. So you know it's the complete opposite. Open minded people, people sharing beliefs of freedom and religious beliefs.

Ah, hang on a sec, I think my coffee is coming. My wife just brought me coffee and cookies.
[Laughs]

6:51 Suzanne

Sounds brilliant. [Laughs]

6:53 Richard

Yes! Where I was? Okay, I found the Eldaring. Totally different. So, I went to the first gatherings here near Trier, where I was born. And I found completely open-minded people, but people rooted, people... Let's say - it's a bad word, but I have nothing else - just normal people. But people, I could get warm with. So, and I think here comes the moment joining the first rituals.

7:30 Jens

Well, thank you for sharing this, Richard. I really appreciate that how open you speak about some of these things. Suzanne, would you like to put some remarks onto that?

7:32 Suzanne

I was going to say it sounds like a very profound experience that you had. At the beginning, when you walked into the forest. And you were listening to it and feeling that connection with it. [Richard: hmm.] Quite powerful.

7:56 Richard

Yes, very powerful. There's nothing or hardly nothing compared than being over night in a tent in the forest and a thunder storm is going on. And you feel this shaking power, this shaking energy. Rain and thunder, wind and lightning, and you feel that you're in your little bubble, in your little tent. And you are a part of it.

08:30 Suzanne

Hmm. Wow.

08:32 Jens

That almost answered the question I hadn't asked yet, but I still would like to ask it. Because in the beginning you spoke listening to nature and how nature called you and then you read the Eddas



and suddenly you switched to Asatru. And I think some people might come to different conclusions or different equations there than you did. So what was it that made you feel Asatru or heathenry is really where you feel you fit in?

09:06 Richard

Hard to tell. [Laughs] I think it was a book by Wolfgang Hohlbein, it was „Mittgard“. Which pointed me into the direction I should further research. You know the book?

09:18 Jens

No. I heard about Wolfgang Hohlbein, I've never read anything by him. He's got a reputation of being a fantasy author.

09:28 Richard

Yes, it's fantasy. Of course, it's fantasy. It's belletristik. But it pointed me into a direction I should further research.

09:35 Jens

Okay. If that's it, that's it.

09:38 Richard

As a teenager, you're very perceptive for those things.

09:43 Jens

Oh, we should try to stay that, but it's hard sometimes. If we pile up more memories and ballast in our lives, in our experiences, they sometimes cloud the perceptiveness, I think. The thunder was a big clue there for me, already.

Okay, thank you. So you have found a group then with whom you go to gatherings, with whom you can do rituals. [Richard: Yes.] Would you please tell us a bit about the practicalities of this. How do you participate in the rituals and in the gatherings? And what is important for you to be included in there?

10:23 Richard

For me as blind person, it's not that hard to participate in gatherings and rituals. We have a place in the forests near Trier, a quarry in the forests. And everything is surrounded by wood. And there is only a small path you can reach it. Sometimes roots grow over it, sometimes branches and trees fall over it. But it's not that much of a problem for me to walk in the group, because I have my white cane which I move in front of me. And everything my cane touches, I know it is there and so I can step over it. Roots and fallen trees and stones and all this. This is not much of a problem, walking around on the site, walking around where the ritual takes place.

When I'm part of the ritual and things are important, maybe the cardinal directions for the hammer blessing. I did the hammer blessing last time the Eldaring came together and had it's Thing. I have a little device, a belt with 16 vibration motors built into it. When I wear this, it vibrates there where is north. So I have the same experience like birds have, when they do their North-South, South-North flying during times are changing.

There are some little devices which guide me and let me take part and let me carry out tasks without any blindness related problems. Some rituals contain parts where you write letters to the



gods. We had this... For example, we write on leaves or we write on little pieces of paper and we then burn those letters to the gods, in the fire. My sighted peers do that with a pencil and I do it in Braille. I have a small device called a Braille slate. You can imagine a metal slate with the negative Braille indentations for every Braille sign. It can carry 28 rows with 29 signs. And then you put your piece of paper in there and then you close the thing and on the back side you have holes spaced like the ordinary Braille signs. And then you have a stylus and then you can punch the holes through the paper from the backside. And then you have positive Braille signs. It's quite handy. It's very low-level, it's very low tech. But it's very efficient when it comes to noting things in Braille in nature, where you don't carry your Braille typewriter around.

13:19 Jens

A typical heathen ritual means that people are standing in the circle and usually a horn is passed. [Richard: Yes] And they something when they have the horn. [Richard: Yes] How do you participate in that?

13:33 Richard

Yes. Ah, that's true. We pass the horn to each other in the circle as we speak. And when my neighbour stays in his place, this is not much of a problem. I know who had the horn first, I know that's now my turn to receive it and to speak.

But there were occasions where my neighbour switched places with another person without me knowing, because I was so deep in the ritual and in this overall experience. I just did not have it on my focus. [Laughs] And then it should have been my turn and I was not aware of it. Because people switched places and I did not realize that another person was offering me the horn. So I highly appreciate that when people change places in the circle, that they would give me a short note of this.

14:31 Jens

At least those standing next to you.

14:33 Richard

Yes, yes.

14:35 Suzanne

Hm.

14:36 Jens

If I think about that one ritual where you also did the hammer ritual, the organisers thought it's a good idea to hand out the texts of the songs they wanted to sing during the ritual beforehand. [Richard: Hmm.] And of course it is nice to sing a song together, but I can't imagine what it helps you if you get a normally printed sheet of paper with the song text just right before the ritual. How could you participate or be included into that?

15:03 Richard

It's possible to OCR, that optical character recognition, with a smart phone when it is printed. But this is not quite handy in every situation. So one way is a person just reading the text to me and I maybe have a chance to memorise everything of it. But a better solution would be to give me all



the materials digital. So just send me an email, send me a pdf, with the texts of all the songs which should be performed during the ritual. So I can read it with my smart phone, my smart phone is talking to me reading everything that is on the screen. There are various gestures I can perform, flicking with one finger right and left to browse through on-screen text line by line or paragraph by paragraph. There are various methods to do it, but I don't want to be that technical right now. But my smart phone is reading out text to me and when I have a chance to get the texts in digital form beforehand, that is much more convenient for me.

16:11 Jens

It would also help other people as well. I had to remember what Jochem in a very early episode when he said that being inclusive, in these practical terms, quite often benefits everyone. So other people would profit from that before as well: okay, what's going to be there. Because it's not that easy to read it in the dark next to the fire on a sheet of paper anyway.

16:35 Richard

Yes, I think, you have your piece of paper and then it's dark, then you need your smart phone to turn on the flash light. So you have already two hands. Then you have your horn. When you don't have a horn holder on your belt, where to put your horn? I really can imagine that having a self-lighting... (What's the word? Not self-lighting. Yeah, self-illuminating. Yes, that's the word I was looking for.) When you have something self-illuminated like a smart phone, you can just have the text from there. It's much more convenient than fiddling around with the flash light.

17:08 Jens

Or memorising beforehand, like some other people do. But sighted people rarely do that. Okay, when it comes to venues and larger gatherings, what's important for you then?

17:21 Richard

I highly benefit from someone showing me the venue in first place. Walking around with me, telling me: Okay, here we will put the altar, here we will do the fire, here are the toilets, all of this stuff, profanities. So I can memorise the place, walk it with my white cane, and later know where everything is.

When it comes to decoration, maybe altar decoration or sometimes we do runes, with sticks on the ground or on the wall or we hang something in the trees, I really like to be able to touch it before. Especially the altar decoration. Everyone brings fruits, leaves, statues, candles, nuts, runes, and figures, and whatever they bring. They decorate the altar in such a lovely way. When I'm allowed to touch it before the ritual starts I am very happy, because I like to be part of what everyone brought. I like to be acknowledging what everyone brought to the altar and during the ritual, I have this picture in my mind and memorise it.

18:34 Jens

Thank you. I need to remember that when I bring something. Because this year, this autumn I wondered whether I should take some seed stalks of the honesty we have in our garden, and fortunately decided for the nuts we have here was well.

18:48 Richard

Oh, sounds good to me.



18:50 Jens

[Laughs] Because these seed stalks, they break very easy. So if you touch them, they break easily. Nuts don't break that easy. [Richard laughs] So it's just good for me to remember: Okay, some people really watch by touching. So I should be aware of that when I bring something. Now that you've mentioned that, would you also tell us how you learnt the runes?

19:17 Richard

Yes. I have a set of runes my wife and me built together. So my wife and me went to the hardware store and bought some wooden discs. I think four centimeters in diameter and one centimeter thick, so decent little wooden discs. We used, I think it was not quite a dremel, I think it was the cheaper China version, to engrave the runes on them, so I could touch them and memorise them. So I now have my own little set of runes in my leather bag with the Thor's hammer on it and I draw them. Not every day but I draw them.

19:56 Jens

Wonderful. So your wife thought you the runes by giving you a means to touch them.

20:02 Richard

Yes.

20:04 Jens

Do we have any more points we would like to add to this section, to the practicalities? Suzanne, do you have any questions?

20:10 Suzanne

I think for me it would be just to ask is there anything that you would like to see at small gatherings or larger ones to help people feel more included in what is going on? Just as a standard thing that maybe organisers could do or consider doing?

20:28 Richard

Oh, I really think it's not the problem with smaller groups. With these regional groups, I think in smaller groups the steward knows the individual needs of the people taking part in the ritual or being part of the regional group. So if someone visually impaired or physical, motorical impaired attends a ritual, the steward knows what to do or you can communicate with the person in charge. When it comes to larger gatherings like Things or the Ostara ritual or things like this, someone could very easily lose overview. Because nobody knows of all the needs of the individual people with impairments. So, I... How to state this? I think there should be a chairman for the needs of whatever impaired people having an overview over the venue, having an overview over the possibilities. Are there for example ramps for wheelchair users? Are there obstacles which we could overcome with mobile ramps, for example? When it comes to visually impairment, it's very individual, so...

21:59 Jens

Of course, accessibility needs are always very individual which makes them quite difficult.



22:05 Richard

Yes.

22:06 Jens

But what I take away is in larger organisations you should make that a designated responsibility of someone.

22:14 Richard

Yes.

22:15 Suzanne

Hm.

22:16 Jens

To take care of that. Not just: Oh yeah, we all care about accessibility, we're all so good people. But it also means: Who is really responsible for that and takes care of that? I don't expect people to be perfect, to know about everything. Because you also don't know in advance will there be people with visual impairments? Will there be deaf people? Will there be people with mobility impairments? It can be so different. But having someone who is responsible I think shows also that it is important and gives a better chance of these needs met when the situation is there.

22:55 Richard

I could not have said it better.

22:57 Jens

Thank you.

22:59 Suzanne

To have somebody responsible shows that organisation or that group of people values everybody. And goes further than say a statement on their events page to say: We include. But also says: Here is the named person you can contact, who will help this site and this event to be inclusive to everyone.

23:24 Jens

Okay. We have been at the runes already, so we made a small step to the mythology side. And the one thing which comes to my mind if I think about blind people in heathenry is one verse in the Hávamál. Suzanne, would you be so kind to read it to us?

23:45 Suzanne

So, it's verse 71. And the modern translation runs like this: "The lame man rides a horse. The one-armed man drives the herd. The deaf man fights and is useful. It is better to be blind than burnt. No one is helped by a corpse."

24:12 Jens

Thank you, Suzanne. Richard, how do feel about that?



24:16 Richard

It's much more inclusive that we have in the bible, for example. I remember another verse from the bible, I think it's Leviticus but I'm not sure, where handicapped people are excluded from going near the altar. So it's very refreshing to have [chuckles] a verse like we find in the Edda.

24:4 Suzanne

Hm.

24:41 Jens

Yeah, which for me basically just says: Focus on what people can do and don't focus on what they can't do.

24:49 Suzanne

Hm. People can still have responsibilities and connections and be included.

24:55 Richard

Yes.

24:56 Jens

Although this verse doesn't make any suggestion for you personally what you could do. It has some suggestions for other people.

25:02 Richard

No, it just says: Be open minded. Yes, and what you already stated: Let's focus on what people can do and not on what they can't.

25:14 Jens

If we look at the Asatru mythology, that also very much reflects basically that people got injured, got disabled during their lifetime, in various ways. Because that's how we ended up with a one-eyed god and a one-armed god, and some others there.

And of course there is the quite well-known story about Hödur who is just mentioned very shortly, when all the gods were making fun of Baldur cannot being harmed by anything or anyone. And Loki has the one arrow from the mistletoe which can. And asks Hödur to join in that game, the blind Hödur. So he is mentioned, we have the blind god Hödur there. He is basically mentioned as being used by Loki to kill Baldur. What's your thought on that, Richard?

26:06 Richard

I think, it's a very tragic story. A story about missed chances of inclusion. Hödur is standing beside and cannot take part in this activity. Because none of the other gods has an idea how to integrate him in the game. The trickster helps him, but with bad intentions. It would have been a problem for one of the other gods to help Hödur aim, or Baldur himself could have had shout: Here I am, here I am! And just aim at where my voice comes from. But none of the gods had this idea. But Loki, he did whatever he did. Some other views on the point here?



27:01 Jens

I think you've basically made the points there. [Suzanne: Hm] So the one I really take from it is, I took from when I thought that before this episode: Oh yeah, nobody else included Hödur. I would like to know how you feel about that and you said it's a tragic story to you?

27:20 Richard

I think it had to be done, because otherwise we would have no story about Baldur joining Hel in her halls. But the way it was done, it's misusive. I think it's not very nice to abuse somebody on his shortcomings.

27:42 Suzanne

Yes. No, it's... It isn't.

27:46 Richard

And Loki did exactly this. He abused Hödur to kill Baldur making use of his blindness.

27:54 Suzanne

Yes, he did very much do that knowing what the result would be. I think... I don't think did it as a joke or not knowing what would happen. I think.

28:05 Richard

No, I'm really sure he exactly knew what would happen.

28:09 Suzanne

Yeah, I think he did that exactly knowing what would happen.

28:14 Jens

He would not have searched for this one mistletoe otherwise. If we look back he disguised himself, I think, as a different person and asked Frigga if she had actually taken the oath not to harm Baldur from absolutely everything. So gaining that knowledge that there is this one mistletoe which she didn't dare to ask for it and he turned that one into an arrow.

28:36 Richard

It was mean. It was mean in so many ways.

28:41 Suzanne

Very, very mean. But it's a surprising thing for me because at this point Odin has one eye. Tyr has one hand. And it doesn't seem to me why there is any reason why Hodur could not have been included when they have been accepting of others.

29:04 Richard

It's curious. Loki played this trick to the blind god. No other god or not even Loki would have come to the idea to utilise a shortcoming of one of the other gods. [Suzanne: Hm] And I researched, but I found nothing where... I found nothing in the Eddas and not in the other texts, where one of the other gods was treated badly because of one his shortcomings.



29:39 Suzanne

Yeah. It seems a very unique circumstance, given that they accept other gods and they don't accept Hodur in the same way in this instance.

29:52 Richard

No. It seems like he is the one who you can do it with. Because he is blind.

30:00 Suzanne

Hm.

30:01 Jens

Which means for us, this story is about 1000 years old, roughly. It is time to do it better [Richard: Yes!] than they did then. And I think we learned a few useful things in this episode to do it better in the future. I am also very happy about the other thoughts and experiences you shared with us, Richard. Any more comments from Suzanne or Richard about this episode?

30:32 Suzanne

Not for me, I think.

30:34 Richard

I'm quite happy to have been a part of it. And I think inclusion starts at the very beginning.

30:44 Suzanne

So let's see if we can find ways to do it better.

30:50 Richard

One of the best and most practical ways is just asking. Just asking: What do you need? How can we do things better? Just stepping into communication with people is the first step of successful inclusion.

31:09 Jens

Okay. So, thank you, Richard, for being our guest. Thank you, Suzanne, for co-hosting, on short notice this time. And thanks to everyone for listening to this episode of the Wyrd Thing Podcast. You can find us online at TheWyrdThing.com and on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) @TheWyrdThing.

Good Bye!

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