



The Circle of Life – Connecting the Green to the Blue

There is no “goal” of The DOC Journey except to fully connect to the moment you are in – whether it is pleasant or not. If you have a goal of getting rid of your pain, your brain will be on the pain and you’ll remain stuck. It is where you place your attention is where your nervous system will develop. So, if there is no destination, why am I on this journey? There are multiple paradoxical effects of implementing these approaches and tools you have been exposed to. They can be summed up in terms of the “Ring of Fire” that can also be viewed as, “The Circle of Life.”

The desired outcome of The DOC Journey is the capacity to occupy your entire circle of life. By being aware of what part of the circle you are in, you’ll possess the tools to move in the direction you choose.



Your bodyguard

The red “Ring of Fire” is the essence of how we evolved and stay alive. Fear and anger protect you from threat. It is always there at some level. Every living organism, even bacteria, exhibit protective behaviors. It can be summarized by the term “being mobilized.” Humans have the capacity with language to label it “anxiety.” The word progression I use to depict this set of sensations is:

- Alert
- Nervous
- Afraid/ fearful
- Angry
- Paranoid
- Terrorized

But a more useful approach is to eliminate these words entirely and simply view these survival reactions as a “mobilized sympathetic nervous system.” You will progressively learn to observe your reactions to the world allow yourself to feel.

What happens is that as you learn to navigate and occupy any part of the circle by your choice and on your terms, life changes. Instead of fighting the red ring, you’ll navigate through it, with the first step being aware that you are “in the red.” Then you’ll have a choice to stay there for a while, move into the blue and get on with life, or enter the green center and give yourself “space” to rest, relax, and regenerate.

The shrinking ring of fire

As you improve your skills to regulate your body’s physiological response to threat, paradoxically the red ring will narrow. You’ll end up there less often and be able to pass through it more quickly. Instead of “accepting” anxiety and anger, you have assimilated it. They are powerful reactions that are a gift that keeps you alive. Interestingly, Dr. Sigmund Freud, in the late 1800’s figured out the essence of mental health was learning to live with uncomfortable emotions. (1)

Nurturing and expanding the center

Although you have to let the red ring narrow on its own, there is a lot you can do to expand the center. This comes at the “expense” of the red ring. If you come from a chaotic and stressful family, the diameter of the green center may be quite small. I ended up in center by default and it was almost impossible to discover by my efforts.

But this where a lot can happen. You can learn self-care and compassion, which will cause the green center to grow and expand. This is also the reason why neuroplasticity is such a valuable concept and reality. You are able to stimulate your brain to develop whatever circuits you would like. It is the essence of healing. Finding and creating safety has a dramatic net positive effect on your body’s chemical makeup and your sense of well-being.

Stuck in the center

For many years, I felt the goal of my journey, even before the onset of my chronic pain at age 37, was to live most of my life in the center. I think that many people feel like that is the goal of many schools of thought. It seems like the center is the most desirable place to be. It is pleasant and safe, but if you become focused on remaining there, your life steadily becomes smaller. You’ll begin to avoid risks, because you want to avoid anxiety and frustration. For many people, this approach works. But for most people, life is the blue ring and includes most interactive experiences. The key question, why are you spending so much time in the blue? If it is to occupy your mind to avoid feeling anxious and frustrated, you’ll eventually wear out and sink into the red and maybe remain there for a while.

In contrast, if your blue activities emanate from the center, that is a completely different experience. You are able to rest and regenerate by your choice. Every new venture, including just waking up and facing your day, involves with firing up your nervous system to a greater or lesser degree. This is especially true when taking on a new endeavor, adventure, or relationship.

Connecting the Green to the Blue

Combining the different levels of awareness with the model of the ring of fire, is powerful and simple. The four levels of awareness are:

- Environmental
- Emotional

- Judgement/ “storytelling”
- Ingrained patterns

As you learn to experience these types of awareness and conceptualize them in terms of the state of your nervous system, you’ll use the tools to move in the direction of your choice. It is also a very dynamic process that quickly becomes largely automatic. Dr. DeMello, in his book, *The Way to Love*, teaches that awareness is all you need to live a rich life. He may be right.

By learning to navigate the red ring more skillfully by assimilating anxiety and anger into your life, you have connected the blue to the green. You are also able to expand the center with activities that engender self-compassion. And by not fighting the red, it will narrow down. You can now occupy your entire life. You have taken it back and more. Welcome!!

References: Cozolino, Louis. *The Neuroscience of Psychotherapy*. Norton and Co., New York, NY, 2002, 2010, 2017.