

Doubtful Certainty & Rational Confidence

Face a full-length mirror and prepare to perform a karate kata. Take your *kamae* (ready posture), take a breath, and settle in for your first movement. If you don't practice kata, face yourself in that mirror as if your reflection were a potential threat and do the same thing, not as if you are about to spar, but as if you were coolly evaluating. Now mentally erase your environment with the exception of that visual reflection. What is your posture? Upright, shoulders back? Head held high? Would you say your posture reflects doubt or certainty? Does it reflect deliberation or confidence?

Certainly **doubt** is the opposite of **certainty**, but you probably doubt my rationality in paring **rationality** with **confidence**. They are not opposites, are they? Part of the rational process, in my opinion, is troubleshooting potential problems. It is facing all the doubts you or others might have and deciding how to address them so that they either are diminished or no longer exist. Rational troubleshooting has gotten me into trouble with naturally positive people who take my desire to pre-solve pre-problems as negativity or a lack of confidence. *Au contraire, mes amies!* It is neither; rather, it is a method of avoiding a blindly hopeful attitude masquerading as certainty. Rational troubleshooting is an attempt to attain an un-doubtable certainty and a confidence that no longer needs take time for deliberation.

Now picture that you are attending a seminar in which the instructor teaches you how receive a side-head-strike with a technique you have never done before. Your body responds with a movement similar to his, yet you cannot seem to smoothly emulate the niceties of his technique and you feel that your technique is not going to work as well. The instructor has been telling you to simply relax, but you feel that if you relax, your unpracticed reception will result in your being hit. He is **certain** of his method and so are you, but you are also **confident** that you have not mastered it as yet. Both of you are being **rational**. Neither of you wants to see you hit by the attacking partner. In an attempt to diminish your **doubt**, the instructor changes his mantra, saying, "Have your partner attack at half-intensity. It doesn't matter how you do the technique. The technique itself will do the job." Knowing you are unlikely to make a mistake if held to this lower standard and that any minor error will not result in pain, you manage to improve the execution of your technique. You have your partner gradually speed up his attack and, with the same relaxed attitude, still knowing you could err but confident that you won't, you increase the certainty of your execution and thus increase your confidence.

Doubt, resulting in a lack of confidence, is normal. No one is good at everything and we can all improve at many things. Without accepting **doubt**, we would not know where to start our self-improvement nor would we have a check on the realism of our newly developed confidence.

However, repeated failure keeps us in doubt such that we may not attempt to try again. In essence, after repeated failure, we become **certain** in our **doubt** and feel it is **irrational** to simulate **confidence**. We have all been down that road. How did we exit the highway?

I suggest it is the same way in which we develop in the martial arts. We simulate the physiology and mental attitude of **certainty** (as we do when preparing for a kata performance or a self-defense interaction), still **doubting** a little down deep. Our actions reveal specific things to work on so we gradually improve until we hit a bit of a wall. At this point, either Sensei or a little sensei in the back of our heads says, "Have your partner attack at half-intensity. It doesn't matter how you do the technique. The technique itself will do the job." *We rationally change our behavior to change our emotions.* The result is the new emotion of **confidence** that we were certain we lacked in the first place.