



Belief is a Choice: Put Down the Potato Chips!

By Susan M. Gallant, Ed. D.

Belief is a compulsion beyond the realm of choice. When we choose, we're relatively clear about options and understand enough to select one. A belief is a psychological state or habit of mind in which we hold a certain proposition, premise, assumption, or idea to be true--at times, without supporting evidence. Once established, we accept such a belief as fact, rarely subject it to scrutiny, and often are not influenced by newly verified information. Like a computer operating system (OS), beliefs become our personal OS forming the "software" of our brains and controlling how we sort and file input data.

Sometimes we hold beliefs firmly as true or false. More often we think of them as grayscale depending on our level of confidence about how the world works. In other words, we may generally believe something, and at the same time hold enough doubt or skepticism to stay open and curious about exploring that belief.

Beliefs are powerful forces with outsized influence on our health and well-being. They inform our behavior, how we react, what we create, and our attitudes toward life. We mirror in our world what we accept in belief. Some beliefs are empowering, some limiting.

Self-limiting beliefs are the junk food of life. Like favorite potato chips — we don't want to keep eating but can't seem to stop. Once hooked, it's easy to go on automatic pilot, and remain unconscious of the impact of the belief until either the bag is empty, or we feel sick. A self-limiting belief is not an idea that we hold. It's an idea that holds us! It constricts us, limiting the unique expression of who we are and what's possible. Once identified, it's important to put the chip bag down and make conscious decisions about what we choose to believe. How do we do that?

First, make the belief "visible" to yourself — name it, visualize it. Next, get curious. Is it true? How do I know? How does this belief impact me? Keep exploring. A good time to start is when you notice a contradiction in what you say, think, and do. For example:

- You want something but repeat a pattern that inevitably blocks you from getting it.
- You hear yourself saying:
 - I don't have enough [time, money, ...] to move toward what I want.
 - Yeah, but ____ [logical reason out of my control, for example, "it's genetic."]
 - I'm too [old, young, ...] OR I'm not [fit, motivated, ...] enough.

If what we want is outside the limits of our current belief structure, then to create it we need to change our beliefs. Remember, beliefs aren't real. They may feel like truth, but they are simply habitual thinking patterns. Bringing our beliefs into awareness is a moment-to-moment mindfulness practice. Our shifts are sometimes incremental, and slow, and sometimes a giant "Aha!" Bottom line: We can choose what we believe.