## Ways to Knowledge of Self

What if you were bi- or multi-lingual? What if you choose to live or study in another country? Whether you learn another language or go to live and study abroad, you are giving yourself the wonderful gift of knowing yourself and the world better.

Think about it for a minute. Don't words convey social attitudes and expectations along with cultural values? Language is powerful – it structures us in so many ways.

When we live in our own country we are often unaware of the social attitudes and cultural values that we have as individuals, as members of our families, or as citizens. There are many social attitudes and cultural values which we have internalized, therefore we think of them as "common sense" or as "everyone should know this." Extensive travel, living abroad, and emigrating are all ways we can be faced with the distinctness of our own being as well as that of the country in which we live, travel, or study.

At some point you become aware that there are words, phrases, expressions, thoughts, feelings and experiences which cannot be easily expressed or even translated into the other language. What and how we think can be transformed by our new experiences and by our original language.

This can influence our perceptions and understanding of what we observe about us as well as our reactions when we are not in our homeland. Similar things can occur when we have classes, work with, or live in the same neighborhood with people who are from another country.

Although we may be willing to learn another language, live and study in another country, embrace the new culture and its style, it is a demanding process. Many feelings will flood us from excitement, dread, and emotional weariness, to satisfaction. To "adjust" to a new language, country, and culture seems like such a small and easy task. In reality, it is not.

When studying another language, take a minute and reflect on its power to influence you. When traveling or living elsewhere, embrace the challenge and see it as a wonderful tool to enhance self-knowledge as well as greater empathy and respect for others.