

# Book Club Guide

## *Living in Different Cultures*

Tamar Frankel

**Why do we need to focus on cultures today?** Not many years ago we lived within our communities and rarely traveled even within our country. We knew our neighbors and their children. Most of us ate similar foods, spoke the same language, laughed at the same jokes, and found the same behaviors offensive. Even though the immigrants to this country acted differently, they did not travel much, just as the American-born did not travel much abroad.

**Today's world is different.** We travel more frequently, both within our country and abroad. We watch television news and read about different nations. In school and at work, we meet people who come from different countries, who have different manners, a different sense of humor, and different sensitivities. In sum, we are exposed to different cultures.

*Living in Different Cultures* Book Club Guide provides suggested questions intended to help book club leaders discover interesting topics for discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.

1. The “language” of culture includes signals or non-verbal communications. People use their hands to convey a message, for example:

- Touch the thumb and first finger to make a circle. In Japan this gesture means *money*. In United States it means *OK*. In Venezuela it is an *offensive sign!*
- In some countries, tapping the forehead with your fingers indicates “craziness” while tapping with the open palm sends the message, “I’m stupid” or “I made a mistake.”

What are other thoughts or ideas we convey through the use of our hands that may send different signals? Think of other examples of cultural signals that might be used to say something that could be misunderstood. How can you recognize when your hand signals are not understood? What would you do if the person who did not understand takes offense?

2. Silence may be a signal of respect and agreement or of disrespect and disagreement. Can you think of times this led to lack of understanding in your life? How did you resolve it?

3. Tipping is common in the United States. An Internet search for “tipping in different cultures” brings up pages of advice on customs in different cultures. Did you know that complimenting a good meal with \$1000 tip could be offensive? Would you study the tipping customs before visiting a foreign country? Would you expect others to know that you are from the United States and assume they would just know and accept your tipping customs?

4. Tell us about a time when you were in a culture very different from your own. Was it uncomfortable or awkward for you? How did you adapt? Did you notice others making an effort to adapt to what they saw as strangeness you exhibited?

5. Tamar Frankel shared many stories about her experiences in Israel and dealing with so many different cultures. Which story resonated the most with you? Why? What did you learn from her example?

6. Tamar Frankel states that every culture has something to give. Think of some examples of things that cultures may have to share. We enjoy foods and recipes from many cultures. What are some other examples in your life that come from other cultures?

7. Tamar Frankel has said that “contributing is more important than winning.” Do you agree with that statement? How does it relate to living with different cultures? Discuss the differences between contribution and competition. Can you think of examples?

8. Discuss your thoughts on the following quote from page 153.  
“We don’t need to judge all the rules of the other cultures. But we ought to know what to expect. We cannot assume that what is so obvious to us is obvious to everyone, or that what is good or bad is the same for everyone. Thus, before we interact with other cultures, we ought to study and try to understand how we can live with them and work with them.”

9. Think about ways to bridge cultural gaps and how you could behave to smooth relations with people from different cultures. Argue and explain to convince? Make fun of the others’ position? Threaten? Or identify with the other party: Would I like to be treated in this or that way? Or find a compromise when the issue is not worth it and fight when it is?

10. Ask yourselves this question as you wrestle with the ways to accommodate others cultures. Is my purpose to win or to find a solution with which all parties can live?

*Living in Different Cultures* is available at Amazon and Barnes&Noble. Book Club and Library discounts available at [www.tamarfrankel.com](http://www.tamarfrankel.com)