

Tess Diduch  
11.2.04  
Talmud

Reflection of oral roots?

The written Talmud looks very much like an onion. The oral traditions themselves built on previous discussion, integrating the whole body of knowledge through human minds. As a result, many discussions revolve about each small segment of the original texts. Since these overlap and self-refer, it is natural to think of a cloud of text, with the older, more comprehensive at the center, and newer and more specific layered around the outside. This is pretty much what they have done, although the format of a managably sized book forced page divisions. On the other hand, the book format also allows the venerated (Rashi) to symbolically be at the heart of the book. The format also allows the reader to follow the discussion over the years and by topic, simply by reading the passages in a certain order, though this order is not mandated, like it would be in a straight linear format.

consequences for reading talmud?

Because of the layered format, the reader is encouraged to integrate knowledge of these seperate thinkers in much the same way as the original participants in discussion did. In the linear format, it is easy to accept each passage as it comes, and not differentiate. Even by placement on page, it is reinforced that each of these passages are thoughts on one idea, not existing seperate from other writings, but overlapping and interacting with them. Thus there is probably a spirituality imparted simply by the reading of the Talmud. The reader feels like a part of the text, submerged in the results of generations of earnest discussion on holy text. It is history, depth and breadth weighted with figures of importance in the religion.