

The Talmud has evolved from an oral tradition. To what extent is this reflected in the construction/layout of the written/printed Talmud?

The fact that the Talmud has evolved from an oral tradition is reflected in the “extremely loose and elaborate commentary” that is found in the Jerusalem Talmud. The flawed editing, both in transitions and discussions, indicates that the text was not written from a single source. Rather, it was gathered from multiple oral sources.

It appears that the Talmud is a source of discussion. Much of the Torah is formed by commentary and explanation. The layout of the page reflects this tradition. The oldest stage of the conversation is at the center of the page, in the biggest type (Mishna and the gemara). Surrounding the main texts are important medieval commentaries. The passages on the side contain commentaries by Rashi. There are also additional commentary by the Tosafot, which originally sought to amplify Rashi’s comments. It seeks to link all of Talmudic literature together. Additional commentary can also be found in the margins and at the back of the volume.

What are the consequences for reading the Talmud?

The consequences for reading the Talmud is that the reader may glean not only the basic principles of Judaism, but also commentary on it. So there is essentially storytelling by multiple sources. Unlike traditional texts, each page of the Talmud contains words from multiple sources. Some state principles, some seek to explain those principles, and some seek to link different principles together. It is rare to see multiple voices in one book. Oftentimes, when new ideas are formed, they tend to be incorporated directly into original thought. The Talmud is unique in that it preserves the original commentaries. This keeps the oral tradition alive.