

Issel Lim  
Talmud Commentary  
2.10.2k4

Oral Tradition apparent:

People tend to meander mentally when they tell stories. There's always a looping of "Well, this happened, and then she said – oh, did I mention that she was wearing this? Yea, so that part of that went into that, and ...". The association within the human mind takes leaps in thoughts and jumps to conclusions. Oftentimes, important details are left out, but become significant later. The Talmud seems to reflect this endless addition.

The Mishnah first clarified various articles in the Torah, providing a text that would apply the ancient words to everyday life. Soon the core of discussion took on many layers and many points of view. The Talmud is a conversation, additive in content and versatile in interpretation. Even the two versions reflect the variety of humanness. The "extremely loose and elaborate commentary" of the Jerusalem Talmud "offers a jumble of textual elucidation," providing still more obscure material to conceptualize. The Babylonian Talmud seems more organized and analytical. These two seem right-brained and left-brained, respectively.

Ambiguity of conversation, names, layout, the need of a diagram to show the twists and turns of Talmudic text all point to the nonlinear and conversational format. Everything builds off everything else by virtue of association. As a friend tells me, "The Talmud is the middle layer of what's essentially notes on Jewish laws and history."

Conseq's:

Consequentially, studying the interpretation of an interpretation of an interpretation many times over might lead to circles. (Or long, repetitive sentences.) Conflicting opinions could contradict each other, and sundry explanations are probably based on personal experiences. Students are probably expected to identify not only the interpretations, but who spoke which, etc. (Much more material, more work, hard to store all that info in a single place, etc.) A good consequence of reading the Talmud, other than more exposure to history and explanations to traditions, is hearing the multiple voices. Students or readers can choose whom to believe or whose advice best fits their own lives.

Question: how do you decide when to stop adding to something? Oral traditions tend to pass on memories while adding new personal experiences to the storytelling tapestry. The Talmud epitomizes evolution in story-telling the ancient way, with its multiple voices and many interpretations.