

## The Printing of the Babylonian Talmud in the Two Printing Presses (1834–1836)

The Babylonian Talmud is the most fundamental and significant Jewish work in the world of traditional Jewish learning.<sup>1</sup> The Talmud is composed of a large number of volumes, and so its printing required extensive and complex economic and technological means. As time went on, many commentaries had been written on the Talmud, and the printers added these to editions of the Talmud, making its publication an increasingly expensive and complicated endeavor. It is important to note that over a third of the titles printed by the Shapira family over the years were tractates of the Talmud—a sign of the importance of the printing of the Talmud to the existence of the printing press.<sup>2</sup> The Shapira family had already published an edition of the Talmud within the first few years that the printing press was active (starting in 1800). This publication was economically supported by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman Barukhovich of Liadi, and correspondingly, most of the profits went to the Rebbe, while only a sixth were transferred to the Shapira family.<sup>3</sup>

After he sold all the copies of the first printing, Moshe Shapira received the publication rights<sup>4</sup> from the Rebbe, and between 1808 and 1813, the Shapira family printing press published

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<sup>1</sup> Dolgopolski Sergey, “What is Talmud? – The Art of Disagreement,” Fordham: 2009; Jay M. Harris, “Talmud Study,” *The YIVO Encyclopedia*, [https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Talmud\\_Study](https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Talmud_Study)

<sup>2</sup> See the virtual library of Vinograd & Rosenfeld, sellers of antique Judaica and Hebraica.

<sup>3</sup> Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Iggeroth Qodesh*, Brooklyn: 2012, pp. 249–252.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 351–357.

another edition of the Talmud, more magnificent than the first. This edition was released twice, in two consecutive printings (the first printing from 1808 to 1813, the second from 1816 to 1822).

Ahead of the printing of the Talmud in the Shapira printing press, the members of the printing press made sure to collect approbations (*haskamoth*) from various rabbis through which they were able to maintain their copyrights. The significance of the *haskama* was that it prohibited other Jewish publishers from publishing another edition of the Talmud for twenty-five years—a sort of copyright in the traditional world, anchored in Halacha and Judaism. In this case, it was supported by the venerated *Tzadikim* (pious elders) of the Hasidic dynasties of those days, chief among them Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of the Chabad Hasidic movement.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For a long discussion on *haskamoth* for the Talmud in the first editions in the Slavuta printing press, see Marvin Heller, above, note 6.