

“And he pitched his tent, with Beth-el on the west and Ai on the east.” (12:8)

Horav Aharon Kotler, z.l., would often cite *Horav Yehudah Leib Fine, z.l.*, the *rav* of Slonim, who commented on the way the *Torah* depicts Avraham Avinu’s travels. The *Torah* records that Avraham pitched his tent with Beth-el on one side and Ai on the other. These were both large cities. Indeed, Ai even had a sovereign during the period in which Yehoshua conquered it. Avraham’s tent, on the other hand, was of a temporary nature, pitched on the crossroads. One would expect the geographical locus of the tent to be secondary to the major cities, i.e., the tent is located near the cities of Beth-el and Ai. Instead, the *Torah* writes that the cities were situated on the west and east of the tent, lending greater significance to the tent than to the cities!

This teaches us, posits *Horav Fine*, that the *mekomos ha’Torah*, places from where *Torah* is disseminated, constitute the central point, the “heart” of the community, while everything else around them is secondary. Avraham’s tent was the *makom Torah*; the other cities were only markers that indicated where Avraham’s tent, the “*ohel shel Torah*,” was located.

The *Chafetz Chaim* observed how secular maps use symbols, ranging from microscopic dots to stars, in order to identify various cities. Whereas the secular world assesses the prominence of a city commensurate with its population and political import, the *Torah* map is founded on a different scale. The *Torah*-learning and *mitzvah* observance of a given area determines the distinction and significance attributed to it. Hence, a town that might be represented by a miniscule dot on a secular map, may quite possibly be a large, bold blip on the *Torah* map. The *Torah*’s guidelines are quite different.