

Ribbis: Matters of Interest

CUTTING THE GRASS

Zvi and Moshe are friendly neighbors. Instead of hiring a lawn company to cut their lawns, they each take bi-weekly turns mowing both lawns. Is there an issue with this arrangement if the lawns are similar in size?

Zvi's lawn is significantly larger than Moshe's. If Moshe cuts Zvi's grass, would that be viewed as "paying" more than he owes?

Cutting

the grass, or any labor, has monetary value, since otherwise one would have had to hire a landscaping company. Therefore, after Zvi finishes cutting the grass for Moshe, it is viewed as if Moshe owes him money for the job, something which can be viewed as a loan.

Therefore,

in case #1, since the lawns are similar in size, there would be no problem with the arrangement. Even if one lawn may be slightly larger than the other, or slightly more difficult to cut, nonetheless it would be permitted. This is usually the case regarding most city blocks or townhouse developments.

In

case #2, since Zvi's lawn is significantly larger than Moshe's, this would present a ribbis issue (if Zvi's lawn was cut second). However, this is only when the agreement was formulated as *conditional*, but if it was clear that they are doing it merely as a favor for each other, it would be permitted (as discussed above in "Trading Meals").

Therefore,

the simplest way to avoid the issue is to clearly specify that it is being done as a favor. Alternatively, the issue can be avoided by cutting the larger lawn first.