

Ribbis: Matters of Interest

TRADING MEALS

A group of friends agreed to take turns sponsoring their weekly dinner at a local eatery. Each week a different one of the group would pick up the tab.

Since it is inevitable that the cost will vary slightly from week to week, is there a problem of ribbis if one meal is more expensive than a previous one?

May shul members rotate a weekly sponsorship of Shalosh Seudos or "lunch and learns"?

The Rema writes (*Orach Chaim*

170:13) that a person should not invite his friend to a meal by stating "Come

eat with me as repayment for the meal I ate with you," as this would resemble

ribbis if the second meal was more lavish. Rather he should say, "Come eat with

me today, and I will eat at your home on another occasion."

Therefore, in case #1

if the arrangement was *conditional* on

each person honoring their part of the deal, there would be a problem of ribbis

should a later meal be more expensive than the previous one.

Since this is hard to

ascertain, friends should avoid making this a conditional agreement.

Rather, they

should specify that they do not hold each other accountable if they do not keep

their part of the deal.

In case #2 one may

argue that purchasing *Shalosh Seudos*,

even when formulated as a formal arrangement, is usually done with the intention of *kavod Shabbos*,

and not with intention of repaying the previous *Shalosh Seudos*.

However, rotating

sponsorship of weekly "lunch and learns" where sponsors presumably are *makpid* on being repaid, would be prohibited. Therefore, they should clarify that their agreement is not conditional, as above.