**The Ultra-Orthodox's Embodied Practice of the Jewish Sabbath in Israel:**

**Freedom Despite Limitations**

# Abstract

In this paper I focus on three embodied practices of the Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Jewish Sabbath - dress, meals, and appropriate conversation topics - and I demonstrate that there is a gap between the religious limitations and prohibitions and the way these practices are experienced as a liberation. Research on the embodied practice of religious people usually focuses on limitations placed on these communities, even if these are accepted through processes of negotiations and personal interpretation. My interviews with Israeli Haredim show a more complicated picture, in which embodied religious law is not experienced as a limitation. Analysis of the feelings that arise when following Jewish law on Shabbat, and the room for maneuver that exists within this law, fills important gaps in the understanding of the daily religious experience, and offers a different point of view to that which characterizes most research dealing with embodied religion and observant religious groups.

# Introduction

“They say that every Shabbat we have an extra soul…a sort of strength…for the soul. We also see it in terms of sleep, in terms of food, in terms of dress…You enter 25 hours, maybe even a little more, of a completely different world. I smoke cigarettes, when Shabbat starts, I don’t smoke. Like my head’s switched off. It’s not that now it’s difficult for me or I’m waiting for Shabbat to end so I can smoke a cigarette. It’s something different. It’s freedom.” (Lidor, 29, a Mizrachi Haredi, Ofakim)

The picture that arises from Lidor’s words illustrates a valuable paradox. On the one hand, he is describing one of the most important limitations of Shabbat for him – the prohibition to light a flame, which means he’s not able to smoke. On the other hand, although the prohibition on smoking should be experienced as a difficulty, Lidor emphasizes that this isn’t his experience, and the choice not to smoke on Shabbat is actually far easier than during the week. Later in the interview, Lidor connects this success to an inner strength, a feeling of freedom, and the substantial differences between Shabbat and the rest of the week.

As Lidor describes, for Haredi Jews who keep Jewish law, Shabbat is an extremely strict and restrictive period. Commandments, laws, prohibitions, family and communal customs and traditions create meticulous norms of action that touch on nearly every area of life, both private and public (from not turning on a light or electric devices, not traveling in a car or buying products, to guidelines about cooking and when to eat), including instructions touching on daily practices of washing hands or going to the toilet (when a blessing is required). On the other hand, regarding these significant Shabbat limitations, many Haredim express similar views to Lidor: feelings of strength, choice, and limitless possibilities in different areas, including economic, social, personal, physical, and familial. by using the test case of the Jewish Sabbath, we can explain the discrepancy between the implementation of religious embodied practices in daily life – eating, clothing, and conversations - and the experience of those same practices, which receive a dimension of holiness and change. The choice of the three practices of eating, clothing, and conversation, may illustrate the embodied expression of acquired cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1973), and the great religious importance that is given to these practices (Carter, 2020) as a key tool for shaping faith and its practical application.

However, in this case, an unsuspicious examination of the explanations given by social groups, particularly disadvantaged ones, regarding social structures, daily life, and embodied practices, may allow the identification and acceptance of the alternative internal logical of social groups with different characteristics (Alexander &, Smith, 1998). In this case, recognition of embodied practices as knowledge that is manifested in practice (Ammerman, 2020), and as high cultural capital that is also appreciated and recognized by their environment (Bourdieu, 1973), may broaden the analysis to show the limitations that apply on Shabbat in a different light, and to a certain extent also allow a broadening of the discourse surrounding social needs, national adjustments and the ways to increase social cohesion between different social groups.

# Embodied Halachic Obligations among Pious Believers – Theoretical Background

Among the three main monotheistic faiths there are pious religious groups who, in the name of the religion, adopt a way of life that includes significant and embodied daily restrictions (Kanol, 2021; Neriya-Ben Shahar, 2017). Usually, studies of these religious practices in the daily life of observant communities are done from a secular-academic, Western, and liberal point of view, and therefore describe religion as a set of limitations. By adopting this approach, though, scholars may miss the sensitive complexity that leads to adopt religious faith (Taragin-Zeller, 2014; Elor, 2006). In addition, this conception also creates a paternalistic and supremacist point of view, one that sees believers, and especially women believers, as especially limited in their agency (Mahmood, 2005), and in need of being saved and provided with secular, Western, and liberal tools to fix their societies (Abu-Lughod, 2002).

In recent decades there has been an attempt to holistically understand religion, its influence and its role in life rituals (Halamish, 2004; White & Pondani, 2022), during festivals (Shoham, 2014), points of crises, in national and international relations (Ammerman, 2020), and in the sensitive relations that exist in different societies regarding processes of secularization and religionization (Ben Porat, 2016; Van der Tol & Gorski, 2022). However, there is still room for more in-depth research about daily religious practices in these communities, and their unique significance and implications (Ammerman, 2014). Regarding the adoption of restrictive, mainly embodied practices, research shows that accepting these strict limitations on a way of life via religious laws generally includes processes of negotiation and interpretation. For example, these studies assume that the laws of modesty aren’t accepted because of a surrender to the patriarchy that seeks to avoid leading male members of the Ultra-Orthodox community into temptation, but due to an interpretation that allows one to see the Jewish laws of modesty via faithfulness to the worship of God (Taragin-Zeller, 2014).

These processes of negotiation also exist in the adoption of modesty limitations in other religions (Mahmood, 2005). Similarly, limitations of uses of technology are seen as a rational choice for the sake of preserving community, with around 20% of the decline in religious belonging attributed to a widening of digital services between 1990 and 2010, while in turn the use of smart devices is consistent with a decrease in satisfaction (Muralidharan, La Ferle & Roth-Cohen 2023). This study follows this trend: The adoption of the religious limitations isn't just the result of interpretation or negotiation, but it is experienced as empowering and liberating. Therefore, the test case of Jewish law on Shabbat shows how understanding embodied religious practices allows a better understanding of the role of religion.

In Jewish law, or Halacha, many of the commandments and obligations are understood to be “embodied” in the sense that they require specific actions or behaviors rather than the simple espousal of beliefs or ideas. This is in line with a broader Jewish emphasis on “orthopraxy” - correct practice rather than solely “orthodoxy” (correct belief) (Hammer & Reig, 2022). Embodied halachic obligations can take various forms, including regular prayer (three times a day for men), the wearing of ritual garments like the kippah and tzitzit, and tefillin. In addition, the laws of kashrut require a very specific set of practices related to food, including what can be eaten and what foods can be eaten together (Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 20b; Pessachim 106a). These embodied laws will be presented below.

# The Jewish Sabbath and the Haredi Sabbath in Israel

It’s impossible to exaggerate the importance of the Sabbath for Jewish religion and culture. This importance finds conceptual, historical, legal, moral, cultural, social, economic, political, and other forms of expression (Halamish, 2004; Ben-Porat, 2016; Ben-Porat & Feniger, 2009). Despite this, research dealing with practices that take up time on the Sabbath are partial at best, both in Israel (Ben-Porat & Feniger, 2009) and in other places (Carter, 2020).

Especially among Haredim, Shabbat is defined and shaped in accordance with the Jewish religious tradition, which relies on the Jewish religious canon, with Shabbat being mentioned for the first time in the book of Genesis: “And God blessed the seventh day and He hallowed it, for thereon He abstained from all His work that God created to do” (Genesis 2:3). There are countless references to Shabbat in Jewish sources; according to most commentators, the most importance reference is in the Ten Commandments (Cohen, 2021; Feinstein, 1964), which has two formulations: “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8) and “Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy (Deuteronomy 5:12). These two unique references, with the surprising differences between them, determine the Jewish obligation to remember and keep the Shabbat and create a range of religious laws for Shabbat. Apart from the general responsibility to preserve Shabbat and its holiness, in Jewish sources there are precise and detailed instructions relating to nearly every aspect of private life throughout Shabbat (Halamish, 2014). The instructions include “positive” commands, whose goal is remembering Shabbat, like lighting candles on Shabbat, Shabbat prayers or kiddush on Shabbat eve, and “negative” commandments, whose goal is preserving the honor of Shabbat, like prohibitions on traveling, using electricity, cooking, or lighting a fire (Levi, 2004). Due to the holiness and importance of Shabbat, the halachic punishment for breaking Shabbat is death, although this law is not kept, and over the years has become more lenient, recognizing different cases in which human life takes precedence over keeping Shabbat (Hatch & Marks, 2022).

Shabbat laws are valid from the start of Shabbat to its end – around 25 hours – with the start of Shabbat symbolized by lighting candles (its time changes according to the time of year). In Israel (and other Jewish communities around the world), the anticipated timetable for the start of each Shabbat is published in advance. The end of Shabbat is marked by the Havdalah ceremony, which is determined by the appearance of three visible stars in the sky. This begs the question of whether the embodied practices that apply to the Jewish Sabbath indeed meet the definition of daily practices, because for believers who adopt the laws of Shabbat there is a significant difference between this day and the rest of the week. In response, I argue that, in the importance and centrality of the Shabbat in the structure of the Jewish week in Israel, alongside the extensive preparations for Shabbat (which many families already begin on the previous Wednesday), one sees a weekly ritual that is different in its substance from other life rituals or national-religious festivals, including other types of embodied practices (Shoham, 2014).

It’s therefore important to note that, despite the restrictions that apply during Shabbat, earlier studies have shown that this time is viewed positively. For example, Carter (2020), showed that, for American rabbis, Shabbat is seen as a crucial tool for consolidating Jewish identity, for focusing on family life, for balancing and preventing excess work etc. In Israel, and in addition to the national restrictions[[1]](#footnote-1) that accompany the religious restrictions and that also shape the Shabbat, it is also described as a positive family time (Engelberg, 2016). However, like Carter (2020), I also find that Haredim in Israel usually acknowledge difficulties related to preparations and adjustments that must be made before Shabbat – on the religious, economic, and familial level. While many Jews around the world adopt several, sometimes symbolic practices on Shabbat (Hahn Tapper, Kelman & Saperstein, 2023), Haredim tend to adopt hundreds and thousands of prohibitions and customs during this period.

Although there are thousands of commandments related to Shabbat (Levi, 2004; Hatch & Marks, 2022), this paper focuses on three commandments and customs that I shall now describe in brief. First, major family meals are extremely important in the Jewish tradition. Jewish sources command the eating of unique dishes on Shabbat, which allow for the sanctification and distinction of this holy day from the other days of the week (Zerubavel, 1989). There are many commandments, traditions, and legal interpretations that deal with Shabbat meals and questions like what to eat, when to eat (see for example: Maimonides, Laws of Shabbat, Chapter 12, Halacha 9), how to cook and when to cook (see for example: Iggrot Moshe OH 4:74, Laws of Cooking (Subsection 3), how much to eat (see for example: Maimonides, Laws of Shabbat, Chapter 12, Halachot 2-3, 5), what to drink, and when to drink (Berachot 20b; Pessachim 106a). Although this is a mostly positive practice, it also contains challenges, as described by Carter (2020): “the challenges of having to cook and eat the equivalent of “two Thanksgiving meals a week,” as well as the cost of living having to live within walking distance of their congregation” (p. 665).

The financial issue also arises in the practice of clothing, because before the start of Shabbat it is customary for some of the social groups in Israel to carry out preparations that include bathing, hairdressing, and shaving, wearing appropriate (mostly fancy) dress, make-up and more (Handelman, 1998). Especially among the Haredim, there is great emphasis on the difference and uniqueness of Shabbat clothing. In practice, the entire family participates in this practice, which includes every aspect of dress, including wearing a tie, special shoes, or wig to distinguish between weekday and Sabbath clothing, as a way of honoring the Shabbat, and in accordance with the many customs that have taken root among Jewish communities around the world (Levinsky, 2002, p. 747). As I will show, in this study the choice of Shabbat clothing is also seen as a significant and empowering experience of embodied choice, despite the strict limitations on clothing that apply to Haredi men and women, both in terms of modesty (Taragin-Zeller, 2014) and segregation (Leon, 2010).

Regarding the third practice discussed in this study, the issue of permitted and prohibited speech on Shabbat, here the picture is more complicated. On the one hand, the stringencies by rabbis and Jewish legal adjudicators determine that Shabbat, as a holy time, requires practitioners to deal solely with holy speech and subjects, and therefore whatever doesn’t meet the definition of holy conversation has no place on Shabbat (Levinsky, 2002). However, it’s clear that living a regular life requires a certain interpretation of the scope of these laws and customs; accordingly, also among Haredim, the conversation topics that are not discussed on Shabbat change from community to community and from family to family, even though different kinds of conversations, primarily conversations that include plans for the future, money, or “vulgar” topics, are not supposed to take place on Shabbat (Hatch & Marks, 2022). I will show that, despite the familiarity with and internalization of the inflexibility and the embodied internalization of the laws of Shabbat, the acceptance of this practice is done consciously and autonomously, so that the embodied expression of this limiting practice is also described as an empowering choice and not merely a limitation.

# Methodology

To examine the outlook of Haredi Jews regarding different embodied practices that characterize the Shabbat of Haredim in Israel, I use the qualitative-phenomenological approach. The goal of the phenomenological approach is to search for meanings of the human experience by understanding the ways in which individuals who perform the action experience and interpret it, from the point of view of individuals, according to their decisions and their interactions with their surroundings on a daily level (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). For the study, I interviewed 15 participants who defined themselves as Haredim. These interviews were carried out as part of a comparative project in which 66 interviews were held with interviewees belonging to different religious streams: national religious, traditional, secular, and formerly religious. Therefore, as part of the comparison to the national religious communities, and sometimes in combination with these communities, the present study is also based on additional interviews from the whole project.

In contrast to other religious streams, when discussing Haredim, it’s easier to locate the target community across a possible continuum of religious affiliations, mainly because this population is extremely strict about keeping the commandments and Jewish law. According to data, today Haredim form around 12% of all adults in Israel. A Haredi woman has on average 4.7 children, and therefore in a calculation of the entire population in Israel (not only the adult population), the number of Haredim in Israel is increasing rapidly and is according to different estimates currently 13-14% of the entire Israeli population. Usually, Haredi Jews in Israel live in closed and shared communities, which are separate from the secular population. The goal of this centralization in relatively closed areas is to protect themselves from the influences of secular modernization, and to facilitate a high degree of harmonization between the cultural and communal characteristics and the environment, for example regarding modesty or traveling on Shabbat (Pinchas, Mizrachi, Zalcman & Shapiro, 2021).

When defining the Haredim in Israel, it’s important not to describe or relate to them as a single homogenous bloc, because Haredim are divided into different streams, groups, and communities, and each community has different characteristics, and within the groups one can define Haredim with variable levels of religious faith. In practice, the Haredim are no less heterogeneous than other religious groups and viewing them homogeneously risks missing many of their defining characteristics. One can distinguish between subgroups of Haredim according to the characteristics of their religious sources, their leaders, and the unique leaders of each group (Leon, 2010; Leon, 2011). One of the main ways of distinguishing Haredim in Israel is to divide them into Hasidim and Litvaks from Europe, and Sephardim from the Middle East and North Africa, who can also be divided into married yeshiva students and youth who were born into Haredi families, or who became newly religious as part of a more complex process that took place in Israel, mainly during the early nineties (Leon, 2011).

In addition, some of the Haredi population seek to actively distance themselves from aspects of the modern word, for example everything related to preferring religious studies over secular studies or preferring studying at yeshiva over working for a salary. However, the assumption here is also that one can point towards more complex and deeper trends of change, as may find expression in the terms “soft Haredim” suggested by Leon (2011) or the phrase “modern Haredim,” offered by Zicherman and Cahaner (2012). They explain that:

These are Haredim men and women, most of them with an academic or professional educational, whose work and income (usually two spouses) is similar to those of the rest of the population, and are defined in economic assessments as middle-class, and sometimes even middle-upper. (ibid, P9)

Therefore, the choice of “Haredi” study participants sought to express a variety of Haredi streams, as well as the axis between conservative and isolationist Haredim, and softer and more modern Haredim, which can also be seen in different Haredi centers, for example Jerusalem, Bnei Brak, Beitar Illit, Elad or Beit Shemesh (Pinchas-Mizrachi, Zalcman & Shapiro, 2021).

The study is based on in-depth semi-structured interviews, which were carried out and analyzed according to the central themes that arose from the field. The structured part of the interview aimed to provide a general description of the activities carried out on Shabbat, the reason for doing them, the place given for different leisure practices during Shabbat, and the connection between these activities and the religious tendency reported by the interviewees. Given the sensitivity of religious culture in the study, excess caution was placed on the rules of ethics, and all the participants were given prior notice of the research questions and goals, and their details were changed to ensure their privacy.

# Shabbat Meals in Haredi Society

Like the two other practices chosen for this study, Shabbat meals in Haredi society in Israel also present multiple meanings. On the one hand, many of the interviewees describe the dining environment, the table arrangement, the food served, the participants in the meal, the seating plan, the number of meals, the duration and the prayers, the blessings, and the conversations between the participants as being repeated strictly every week. In addition to their religious value, Shabbat meals are attributed with a significant symbolic family value, which leads to social sanctions towards family members or religious Jews who aren’t strict in following them according to tradition (Engelberg, 2016).

On the other hand, despite the total absence of variety and choice, these meals include a wide variety of expressions that demonstrate a powerful, unique, and rich experience, distinct to both other communities and days of the week. Leah, a 25-year-old Haredi woman from Beit Shemesh, explains how the family holds a meal every week with identical characteristics:

The food we eat is mostly very traditional, like, there’s challah [special Shabbat bread], salads, fish, soup (even in summer), and then the main course, chicken and sides, sometimes desert, not always. During the meal, we usually learn something, maybe Rambam or something from the Halacha, or my father opens the Gemara or something, we sing Shabbat songs, usually we sing something between every course.

While Leah emphasizes the order of events, Ayala, a 51-year-old Haredi woman from Elad, presents the look of the table and how it is arranged to explain how, for 27 years, meals in her family have been held uniformly:

This June, I will have been married for 27 years, and in our family we eat in the same setting. Like, the first course will always be fish or…there are a variety of fish. We are strict about gefilte fish. It will always be that way...there will always be chicken soup. It doesn’t matter if it’s 38 degrees outside. The menu is fixed.

Etti, a 47-year-old Haredi woman from Betar Illit, also emphasizes the duration of the Shabbat meal, the regular dishes and the blessings that are part of the meal:

We sing Shalom Aleichem and Eshet Chayil.[[2]](#footnote-2) Then my husband makes a blessing and drinks grape juice. He blesses the children. We wash hands. We start with fish and challah. It’s rare for us to buy challot. I try to bake them myself. Fish, challot and salads and then soup, and then chicken and sides. Desert. And…then what? That’s it – we say grace after meals. Of course, we sing…It’s a long meal…I think it’s at least two hours.

With their words, Etti, Leah and Ayala emphasize the order of events, the special food that is served and the mixture of blessings and songs and eating, which also results in an especially long meal. Sometimes, the strict requirements surrounding the fixed time schedule that characterizes Shabbat are understood as a custom that the family has followed over the years, without its source being completely clear:

It’s a Hasidic custom, don’t ask me what its source is but…We don’t do kiddush between 6 and 7.[[3]](#footnote-3) So if you didn’t manage to get back from shul until six, you make kiddush at seven, and then there’s really time to relax on the sofa. (Eyal, 43, Haredi man, Petah Tikva)

The customs and traditions described by the interviewees as shaping the contemporary Haredi Shabbat table in Israel are described like those that shaped the Jewish Sabbath in Europe for many years. According to Ta-Shema (2004), and in accordance with an article that he published in 1969, already from the 18th century the customs of a *d’var Torah* [a talk based on the weekly Torah portion]by the father, alongside the same songs, including for example Kabbalat Shabbat and the song *Lecha Dodi* were present (Sperber, Volume 4, Chapter 2, Pages 1-7; Levinsky, 2002, P748). The preservation of these patterns also teaches the importance of the customs accompanying the Shabbat throughout the generations, and the great significance given to preserving these customs, which can’t be altered or chosen, during Haredi meals. The strictness surrounding the meal and its characteristics don’t necessarily stem from religious commandments, but from the desire to preserve a permanent family tradition, and anyone who wants to violate them encounters negative responses from the rest of the family:

Take my father’s family, it’s forbidden to get up suddenly from the table. It’s a cultural issue that nobody gets up in the middle. So usually, my sisters and I and the oldest son, we sing more, we participate more, and my father talks. Also, many times he is talking and we are talking between us and then he asks for us to be quiet. (Ayala, 41, Haredi woman, Elad)

Ayala’s words illustrate the limited tools, usually social and not necessarily religious, whose goal is to preserve the existing order as much as possible. Sometimes, the uniqueness of Shabbat and the desire to preserve it in a certain way may also influence the seating arrangements, when on one side are women who explained how the parents sat at the sides of the table, while others emphasized the desire for everyone to sit together:

We sit at a table with two heads. I can tell you that I sat next to my husband for many years. The older the children got I felt that we needed something to gather them around us, so I moved to the opposite site. (Ofra, National Haredi woman, 20, Ofra)

In other families, the seating plan may be different, but it is also seen as fixed, with a goal of creating a “Shabbat Table” that suits the family’s experiences and traditions, and therefore a lot of thought is put into it:

I know that in my husband’s family the parents sit next to one another. They have a really big family. And all the children somewhere around the table and you see the parents talking and the children playing. It’s really easy for the grown ups to get carried away talking about things at our level…and the children are all around, so we adjust ourselves to them. (Hani, 47, Haredi woman, Bnei Brak)

These quotes illustrate how, alongside the quality or variety of food and the family composition of the meal, great thought is put into the Shabbat meals of Haredi families in Israel, which may find expression in the smallest details – whether it’s the form of serving food or the seating arrangements. Additional obligatory laws during Shabbat meals are blessings and prayers, and it is important to note that these aren’t only carried out on Shabbat, but during Shabbat its characteristics are more unique and important than the way in which they are carried out during the rest of the week. One can understand the great importance of Shabbat prayers and some of its unique characteristics from the following excerpts:

The foundation of Shabbat is firstly based on prayer. On Shabbat we have four prayer services. We have the evening service, morning service, the additional service, and Mincha. The evening prayer after Shabbat already seemingly belongs to Sunday, right? Because Jews start the new day at night. A person’s whole day is essentially arranged according to the Shabbat prayers and meals. (Rafael, 25, Haredi, Ashdod)

Here, Rafael repeats and emphasizes how the Shabbat prayers create tremendous obligations, which together with the Shabbat meals practically control the entirety of Shabbat. Ezra, a 35-year-old Haredi man from Jerusalem, paints a similar picture:

Shabbat meals always take place after Shabbat prayers. There are the evening prayers, and afterwards the Shabbat evening meal. Afterwards [the next day], there’s the morning prayers and the extra service and then the Shabbat lunchtime meal – it’s called the second meal. And then there’s the afternoon service and then the third meal which is just before Shabbat goes out.

In his remarks, Ezra explains why these meals define, to a great extent, the Shabbat schedule, when the length of the meal and the halachic aspects of the different meals create a fixed window of time around the running of Shabbat. Also here, the time of Shabbat doesn’t only create detailed operating instructions, and doesn’t only limit the types of food, which of course must be prepared in advance, but it also touches on the timing of meals, the number of meals and the manner of conduct during the entire meal. Among certain Haredi streams, the blessings and the prayers also fill up the little time that is left unoccupied:

My father is also strict about doing 100 blessings. Like we bless everything, we want to make 100 blessings a day. Now a religious Jew who prays three times a day in a minyan – that’s a problem for him. The Amida, that’s already 19 blessings and they easily reach, like you eat and you’ve immediately gotten to 100. You also go to the toilet. On Shabbat there aren’t 18 or 19 blessings, but seven. So you lose a lot of blessings. And there’s no tefillin, so you lose a lot of blessings. So it’s much harder on Shabbat to reach 100 blessings…he counts right, there are all the automatic prayers that you know from where you begin and then you need to count going to the toilet and eating. So yes, sometimes in the middle of the afternoon he…looks for things to eat so he can complete the blessings. And sometimes, if he’s really desperate, he smells a lemon because there’s a blessing over it. (Leah, 25, Haredi woman, Beit Shemesh)

Here, Leah emphasizes the need to fully utilize the time of Shabbat for holy purposes, in a way that leaves hardly any free time. In so doing, all these characteristics create what is described as a permanent, inflexible, and repetitive “setting,” for which an attempt to break or to change its components will result in a negative response from dominant family members. These characteristics may be the main difference between Haredi Sabbath meals and those of more religious, traditional, and secular people, which are often characterized by the partial changing or individual adoption of the laws of Shabbat. However, when describing the schedule and strictness of Shabbat eating practices, the interviewees emphasize a different experience. This is seemingly an intensive period of time that is set in advance, but it is also a time in which they are able to do “everything they weren’t able to do [during the week].” Ezra, who earlier described the packed Shabbat schedule, says in the same excerpt how, despite the long meals and their strict preparations, a meaningful window of time of choice and freedom is created:

Within this thing [Shabbat] people know there is nothing outside of it. It doesn’t matter what everyone is focusing on with the family, with friends, with learning Torah, which on a daily basis maybe people don’t manage to get to. Now’s the time.

Like Ezra, other interviewees explain how, despite the difficulties, they experience cultural and social richness. For example, Judith, a 45-year-old Haredi woman from Bnei Barak, explains how during winter, when Shabbat starts and ends earlier, the order and pace of the meals is quick and obligatory:

It’s not exactly the end of Shabbat because there’s also the third meal. The third meal is normally during sunset. We wash hands until sunset. Again, separate winter and summer. In winter there’s no time at all…you finish lunch at two and at half past four it’s already time for the third meal, so we maybe rest a bit, maybe sit and talk a bit. Immediately there’s already another meal.

However, Judith immediately continues:

It’s an incredible experience. It’s an incredible experience. I’m a mother of sons but I have a married sister who lives far away and comes…because her husband also goes to synagogue. And…this is the time. Now I’m also a grandma. I also have a daughter who lives a 35-minute walk away and if she does Shabbat at home, she comes to me. Like, you come…and it’s an incredible time. It’s dairy meals. Quiches…Sometimes we sing, we chat. It’s incredible quality family time, incredible.

On the one hand, Judith describes the burden and the obligation to act according to the strict guidelines, but on the other hand within these strict guidelines a unique, enabling space is formed, which is not experienced as limiting. In other cases, despite the significant and pious limitations with which the order of Shabbat meals is preserved, Shabbat is still viewed as being characterized by a special intensity, which is transferred via meals, and maybe provides the ability to deal with the difficulties created by the intensity of the amount of food and the schedule:

On Shabbat, I can say for myself, I eat more. Any person that you ask will say that on Shabbat they eat more. And I’ve got no problem, we eat on Shabbat, at ten in the morning we eat cholent.[[4]](#footnote-4) Ten in the morning! (Lidor, 25, Haredi man, Ofakim)

Here Lidor emphasizes that the differences between Shabbat meals and weekday meals is based on a a certain level of strength that a person has on Shabbat, because what it’s possible to eat during Shabbat isn’t in his view possible on another day. This general feeling, which can’t always be clearly understood or conceptually distinguished in relation to the changes that characterize it, also finds expression when the interviewees describe the changing taste of the food that is served on Shabbat:

It's not just a regular day, it’s really a more special time, to the point that we say that even the food itself has a more special taste when it’s eaten on Shabbat. Let’s say you eat the same food, the same dish, you do it on a normal day, it won’t come out like the food on Shabbat. This says that there’s a special mix that’s called holy Shabbat, like we’re doing it to honor Shabbat so there’s something special in the food, in everything. Only in that way is it possible to eat so much. (Eyal, 43, Haredi man, Petah Tikva)

Here, Eyal seeks to explain how it’s possible to cope with four such significant meals over the course of Shabbat, when these eating habits are so different from what he and his family are used to for the rest of the week. As part of his explanation, Eyal emphasizes the different taste of the special food of Shabbat, as a kind of enabling change, which finds genuine physical expression. Therefore, this physical expression may lead to the choice of foods that aren’t eaten at all during the rest of the week:

There’s a different atmosphere, the food is different…We often talk about the fact that the food tastes better on Shabbat than on a regular day. At my parents I eat salty fish, I love salty fish. I’ll never eat salty fish on a Monday. It wouldn’t make sense. It’s got nothing to do with Monday at all. There are things that are only for Shabbat. Do you want to know what that something different is? It’s the magic of Shabbat, just like that. (Maya, 29, national religious woman, Beersheba)

Additional expressions of the overall richness and choice that characterizes Shabbat is woven into the unique layout of the table, which forms a meaningful space of choice and empowerment. In this case, one can see that there is a changing space for choice within the layout of the table, which is described by the interviewees as an issue of great importance:

The serving of the food is at an extremely high level. The utensils, there are no disposables. And there’s sometimes a variety of arrangements, you know, types of napkins, fabric, not fabric, folded. Like that. A bit of color, so it will be interesting. (Haim, 38, Haredi man, Jerusalem)

While Haim emphasizes the differences in the napkin colors as an expression of the tangible difference between one Shabbat and the next, Judith, a 45-year-old Haredi woman from Bnei Brak, describes how the flower and napkin arrangements on Shabbat can change, as well as the liquor bottles or the serving bowls:

There are some very expensive dishes on Shabbat. There are various bottles of liquor. There are some extremely special serving bowls…I’m not talking with you about a tablecloth. On a regular day we don’t put a tablecloth on the table. On Shabbat I have a set of tablecloths, one more beautiful than the other that I change according to the flowers that I buy. Everything is tailored, the tablecloth and the flowers and the utensils.

In contrast to the way in which the first set of excerpts formed a picture of strict guidelines and repetitive repeating of the eating practices that characterize the Shabbat, the above excerpts emphasize an entirely different experience, in which the interviewees emphasize freedom of choice and symbolic richness, even if regarding small things, which may be interpreted from the outside as more marginal. In practice, for the interviewees, the space of choice that touches on napkins, flowers or the types of liquor that are presented throughout Shabbat are a meaningful space, which creates a respected part of the array of Shabbat and the enjoyment that accompanies it. A similar point arises from the gaps that touch on Haredi dress on Shabbat.

# Haredi Dress on Shabbat

As has been noted, one of the main characteristics of Haredi Jews is their unique dress practices. Haredi men and women have extremely different dress codes to their secular counterparts, with Haredi dress being guided by the principle of modesty, in all its meanings. The first aspect of modesty includes covering the body as much as possible, resulting in wearing clothes longer than the length of the elbows and the knees, avoiding tight clothing that emphasizes the female body, a complete covering of the hair for married women, thick socks throughout the year etc (Elor, 2010). The second aspect of modesty relates to the desire to avoid excess visibility or attracting attention, which leads to clothing practices that don’t include illustrations or especially clear pictures, strong colors, or combinations that may attract attention. The third aspect of modesty is the lack of investment in clothing, with resources being used elsewhere. Also in this case, many in the Haredi community view wearing expensive clothes or brands as an inappropriate and therefore undesirable use of resources (Taragin-Zeller, 2014).

While Haredi modesty guidelines mainly relate to women, Haredi men also follow strict dress practices, including extensive adherence to colors of clothing, shoes, hat, kippah, tzitzit and more (Elor, 2010). Haredi men’s clothing may reveal the social hierarchy, the age of the young man or his community, and appropriate clothing is already instilled during the stages of early education, as part of the desire to segregate and to preserve the community in comparison with secular communities (Hakak, 2009). As a result of these modesty characteristics, Haredi men, in Israel and around the world, usually wear black suits and white shirts, without any styles or personal expression. However, in relation to dress and modesty, there are also large gaps between the narrow range of possibilities and the strict and inflexible rules for Haredim, and their self-experience, especially on Shabbat:

The Haredi Shabbat is extremely festive in dress. There’s a thing of having all the children wearing the same thing. It’s really funny, but let’s say I go to the stores to find clothes for my little one, for Shabbat, so let’s say the salesperson can offer me jeans. We don’t wear jeans on Shabbat, even if it’s with a white shirt. On Shabbat there are clothes like…If you go to Bnei Brak on Shabbat you’ll see that you’re in a world of large events. People dress really festively. Almost like an event. It’s really festive. It’s not sporting. (Hani, 47, Haredi woman, Bnei Brak)

Hani’s words describe the view of the festive street that is created by the Shabbat clothes. It’s true that here there are also limitations, including quite a few clothing items that are seemingly not suitable for Shabbat, but the separation between Shabbat clothing and daily clothing also creates for men, women, and children a new and different space of choice:

At home I really like [to wear] long dresses and in public it’s not acceptable to go around in long dresses. Like, I can’t go out today for an afternoon meeting in a long dress. I really like it. At Zara, the stores, there are really cute things. It’s fun, I like the look. So on Shabbat I celebrate it. (Judith, 45, Bnei Brak).

Also, the uniqueness of the clothes and the space of choice that characterizes them may also find expression in the price of the clothes and the willingness to invest in them, in contrast to one to one of the most important characteristics of modesty during the week:

Clothes are expensive and go with hair bows. The girls go around with splendid hair bows and gold or silver shoes. In poor families, their children also dress festively. (Shinedy, 45, Haredi woman, Netanya)

The cost of clothing isn’t only expressed in prices, but also in the changing amount and variety, which also includes a new space of choice and possibilities:

I have Shabbat versions of everything. I even have Shabbat slippers. Even down to that level. There are even Shabbat wigs, by the way. That’s how it is, even for men. Even the men wear…they don’t go out with a shirt and pants. By the way, it’s the same for them. Like, with the capote. With the shtreimel. All the men sit at ours with the capote. (Ayala, 41, Haredi woman, Elad)

These excerpts highlight the differences, the uniqueness, and the luxuriousness of Shabbat clothes on nearly every level, starting from the type of clothes not worn on Shabbat, like jeans for example, including the uniqueness of clothes (“gold” or “silver”) or with an emphasis on combining different clothing articles in white. While these quotes illustrate a certain degree of conservatism in clothing choices, mainly among men who choose to wear a jacket or hat that is typical of their community over the generations, they also display a certain degree of choice, in contrast to during the week, for example the choice of a tie:

I have shoes that I wear on Shabbat. I have a suit that I wear on Shabbat. Ties that I only wear on Shabbat – I don’t wear a tie during the week. I honor the Shabbat and when it begins I organize myself accordingly. (Rafael, 25, Haredi man, Ashdod)

Often, when choosing Shabbat clothes, even the modest clothes of women combine the modern and contemporary:

I really like to wear a dresses, like national religious women…. Usually I don’t wear these dresses…the Zara dresses and the like, long dresses. (Leah, 25, Haredi woman, Beit Shemesh)

The clothing choices described show how Shabbat doesn’t just offer the possibility of wearing more expensive and unique clothes than those which are suitable for weekdays, but sometimes these clothes are actually described as fashionable and contemporary, and purchased from modern international stores, for example Zara. Therefore, it’s interesting to note that the Haredi interviewees saw themselves as the only community to completely separate between Shabbat and weekday clothes, with Haredi interviewees describing the absolute separation in clothes (and other tools intended for Shabbat) on Shabbat as a practice unique to them:

With the [national] religious, they use the same…with us everything is different, the set is different, the amount, the plates, everything is different. The clothes…everything is different from the shoes to the…everything. (Nehamiah, 42, Haredi woman, Bnei Brak)

Sometimes, the different dress on Shabbat is also a symbol of the separation between the holy and the secular, when the very start of the Shabbat is symbolized by changing into more festive clothing:

I need to shower before Shabbat. I need to dress, to put makeup on, to put on a wig, to wear Shabbat clothes, to check that the whole house is organized and arranged. Once the candles are lit it means the house has already started Shabbat. (Yehudit, 45, Haredi woman, Jerusalem)

Something else that can be seen in relation to the unique Shabbat dress is that it’s not connected to the question of leaving the home. That is, Haredim usually dress up elegantly even if they know they won’t leave their home at all during Shabbat. This issue emphasizes that this isn’t necessarily about cultural or social habits, but about a personal choice, whose source is in the subjective feeling that accompanies the change of dress:

The clothes are very elegant, heels, Shabbat wig. Yes, I don’t look like this on Shabbat. I wear makeup, I have a different wig. Of course, there’s a different wardrobe of clothes on Shabbat. Heels only on Shabbat, I don’t wear them during the week. It’s not just my look, it’s also the look of my husband and children, since we have a Hasidic background, so on Shabbat we wear Hasidic clothes, we all change how we look on Shabbat. We look different. (Judith, 45, Haredi woman, Bnei Brak)

Here, it’s important to note that this isn’t a choice that is made due to religious obligation, because the halachic specifications don’t define the type of clothing, and the space for interpretation here is especially large. So, a choice is created that is intended to honor the Shabbat, because of the desire to reach Shabbat in a sort of personal peak, which emphasizes the otherness and grants a new space for the embodied and particularly limiting practice for Haredim. For most, this process is internalized and transmitted within the family:

We are strict about also sitting at the Shabbat table completely dressed…ah, another anecdote that is connected to clothing…You know, at home we usually sit with some kind of headscarf, some kind of head covering, some kind of hat. There are tailored items like this…I always wear a wig even at the Shabbat table…I won’t wear some kind of rag on my head, and this will also pass to the next generation. (Eti, 47, Haredi woman, Betar Illit)

As these quotations illustrate, the desire to preserve as complete a separation as possible between Shabbat and weekdays also finds expression in clothing and external appearance, with this separation being preserved when the Haredi family is in or outside the home. As the excerpts show, many Haredi women describe this as an opportunity to express themselves and their fashion sense and men describe their uniqueness in comparison to other religious people through dress, but at the same time criticism was also raised regarding the economic price that may have to be paid for festive Shabbat clothes:

The suit industry, OK? People can buy a very simple suit, but they already buy an elegant suit because they know that they’ll wear it on Shabbat. I’m talking with you, it’s in an extreme case that people only have one suit. Many people buy two suits. One for the weekdays and a special one for Shabbat. Why do they buy a special suit for Shabbat? There’s a halacha that says a person needs to wear special clothes on Shabbat. So there are special Shabbat shoes. There’s a special Shabbat suit. It’s a lot of money. (Shlomi, 35, Haredi man, Jerusalem)

Whether focusing on the criticisms of the special Shabbat clothes or the positive spiritual experience that accompany them, this is undoubtedly a significant phenomenon, which shapes and builds the Haredi Shabbat, and emphasizes how one of the most basic embodied practices of wearing clothes also expresses the gap between choice and uniqueness and limitations. It’s true that the choice to completely change one’s dress throughout Shabbat is based on Jewish law, but one can see how many of the interviewees offered a personal and wider interpretation of the choice and the investment in clothes for Shabbat. The change in the clothing of Haredim on Shabbat can result in a change in perceptions and values, which sanctifies and distinguishes the Shabbat. So, one can see how real use is made of the body for the purposes of change and consciousness education (Hakak, 2009), and for one of the most basic embodied practices (Bourdieu, 1973), which contains social and cultural limitations, but also expresses choice, meaning and empowerment for the personal management of the social space. In addition, the visual change may also be combined with a change in consciousness that facilitates and leads to a change in the topics of discussion that characterize Shabbat.

# Appropriate Shabbat Topics of Conversation

Another important characteristic that’s mainly relevant to the Haredi Sabbath is the limitation on conversation topics on Shabbat. On the one hand, one can say in general that it’s clear that these include a certain layer of holiness, including deeper spiritual engagement with theological issues, as we can see from the following quotations:

It’s like there’s a level of holiness in these meals. We won’t talk for example about…there’s a need for there to be lofty topics. On a spiritual level. Like, we won’t talk about a flat that we want to buy. Where we’ll renovate the room and which school bag the child wants. We will only talk about meaningful topics. There’s a place of respect for the meal. (Hani, 47, Haredi woman, Bnei Brak)

Hani’s words show that there are concrete limitations in this field, and a Haredi family is expected to avoid talking about profane issues. Therefore, another interviewee emphasizes that an attempt to hold this kind of conversation may lead to criticism and a negative response from other family members:

Let’s talk about something that you asked about the subject of Shabbat - that we talk only about things connected to Shabbat…Now I want to talk about, I don’t know, a movie I saw, they’ll say something to me. They’ll say to me ‘it’s not appropriate’ or ‘it’s not the right time,’ but I want to talk about the movie now, I didn’t talk about it the whole week, now’s the time. (Shinedy, 45, Haredi woman, Netanya)

Sometimes there are situations in which the need to avoid profane conversations creates a situation in which information with news value for someone in the family will be postponed until the end of Shabbat, even if this is done artificially, as can be gleaned from the following incident:

You don’t talk about profane things. Anything connected to the profane – you talk about it after Shabbat, or on Friday…Let’s say that last week I bought furniture for the house. I did it on Friday, I didn’t have a chance to talk with my family, I came home, I showered, and I went to synagogue. So only after Shabbat will they ask how much the furniture cost, how it is, look at pictures etc. (Lidor, 29, Haredi man, Ofakim)

On the other hand, despite the desire to deal with higher topics, more than one of the interviewees described difficulties in creating full separation or working exactly according to the halachic interpretation related to the prohibition on speaking about profane topics. In this case, this difficulty also creates a significant space for choice and self-conduct, which demonstrates the differences between different families and communities:

The Gemara teaches that it’s forbidden for a person to talk about the profane on Shabbat. it’s forbidden even to talk, for example after Shabbat I go to buy clothes. It’s forbidden to talk about anything that isn’t for the purposes of Shabbat. For example, you serve the fish, you bring the hummus, the wine. Something that’s connected to Shabbat or Torah. Nothing else. It’s forbidden to read a newspaper. It’s forbidden to read a book that isn’t related to the Torah. It’s forbidden to talk about what you did the previous week, it’s forbidden to talk about what you’ll do the following week. Why do I say that this is an issue? Because I still haven’t met a single person who has succeeded in meeting this requirement. OK? I already gave up on it when I was around 13. I can’t do it. The conversations with my family around the Shabbat dinner table are absolutely about things I did, about things that they did, about politics, about security. I do it at the Shabbat table. (Rafael, 25, Haredi man, Ashdod)

Here, Rafael presents an ambivalent position, in which on the one hand he recognizes the halachic limitation, but on the other hand he chooses to give up on it. Although he is a Haredi man who is strict about the different laws of Shabbat, he says that he “can’t” perform the halacha that sets the accepted topics of conversation on Shabbat and therefore he is compelled to give up on it. While Rafael describes a complete renunciation, the space for conduct and choice within the embodied practice of conversation in Shabbat comes up mainly in the grey area of the choice to implement a prohibition on certain topics and not on others. In this context, one can point to several main limitations on conversations during Shabbat. For example, interviewees explained that daily matters are permissible, while practical future plans are not discussed:

None of us have the right to vote in the United States but it would be wrong of me to say that we never discussed Trump and Biden at the Shabbat table…again, like, a little…exactly on Shabbat…on the Shabbat that Biden won…We were like…joking about it…I actually have one son-in-law who has the right to vote, he’s American…but it doesn’t really affect anyone…corona is an issue…there’s that…that’s not holy. Yes…no. Definitely not. Like, there’s the setting that he runs the table and he gives it a framework and he’s happy. (Etti, 47, Haredi woman, Betar Illit)

As Etti’s words show, there is a place for free conversation on current affairs, if it does not result in practical guidelines for action or plan. The prohibition on making plans is also an organizing principle for other interviewees:

There’s the issue that if you want something to really be realized, so they tell you not to talk about it on Shabbat. Because if you talk about it on Shabbat, you shouldn’t make plans. So I make an effort not to make actual plans. There’s a song for Shabbat meals that says reflections are allowed. It’s permitted to reflect, but not to plan and not to talk practically. Because whatever you plan won’t happen. So I make an effort not to plan things, that’s something that I will maybe postpone until after Shabbat. (Ayala, 41, Haredi woman, Elad)

Here, Ayala’s words raise a fascinating issue, because the choice not to talk about certain topics on Shabbat is seen as a powerful tool in the hands of the interviewees and their community, which can in practice thwart the realization of plans. Ayala describes a situation in which believers receive almost mystical abilities to control the possibility that things will happen, if they only knew to apply a limitation to them and to avoid talking about certain topics throughout Shabbat. Apart from the desire to make plans, many of the interviewees said how they avoided dealing with controversial issues, mainly between couples, because of the desire to preserve a nicer atmosphere throughout Shabbat:

There are topics for conversation…because you know if it’s things…between me and Netanel that can create tension, so maybe I will try to ignore them, so as not to create this tension during Shabbat. So that the rest of Shabbat will be calm. Yes, there are things like that. (Shinedy, 45, Haredi woman, Netanya)

Here, Shinedy essentially adopts the especially partial interpretation on applying the prohibition against secular topics on Shabbat, because the only topics that are left outside this area are disputed topics. In so doing, she creates another tool to create a pleasant and comfortable atmosphere for her and to interpret the embodied halacha that limits the conversation topics on Shabbat to her benefit. Another prohibition which came up among many interviewees is the prohibition to talk about money. In this context, it’s important to note that national religious interviewees, and not only Haredi interviewees, related to this as a major issue, but the phenomenon is far more common in conversations with Haredi interviewees:

I tried to think where I stop and say “It’s Shabbat today, let’s change the conversation.” So it will be about money, like how much do you make for this work. It’s not a Shabbat conversation…maybe not on amounts, but we do talk if it’s something that keeps us busy. If we’re talking about something in the economy, then the conversation will become economic, but we don’t talk about how much rent we pay. (Eliana, 25, national religious, Beer Sheba)

These excerpts show that the choice of appropriate topics of conversation for Shabbat aren’t always made consciously, and for many the choice to avoid plans or conversations on economic topics is seen as natural, and not as a significant concession, with conversations “about life” continuing as normal. The reason not to talk about money is sometimes seen by the interviewees not as the result of a prohibition, but as the result of the nature of Shabbat, which does not involve financial expenditure, and therefore there is no need for a conversation like this:

Me and my husband can talk about money. The truth is we didn’t have a chance to talk a lot about it. Like, financial matters are discussed less on Shabbat. It’s also less relevant because there are no expenses on Shabbat. We don’t go out, we don’t do, we don’t talk about money. It’s not a topic for discussion. (Ofra, 29, national Haredi, Ofra).

Despite the complexity that leads to many broadening the Shabbat conversations beyond purely holy subjects, a conscious and unconscious process is created of choice and planning, which suits the worlds and desires of the believers, and even provides them with strength to control the reality and the future by adopting the limitations on conversation practices. It’s therefore interesting to see how the solution to the tension between the desire to be updated on different topics and the prohibition against this creates separate spaces in which this is seen as more acceptable, in a way that also illustrates the female and male area for action in Haredi society:

There are topics that aren’t spoken about at the Shabbat table. They are topics that are more appropriate to be spoken about quietly on the couch or in the kitchen. There are topics like that. There’s even on Shabbat a custom for men that if they really want to, they’ll go to the kitchen. And my kitchen is open but it’s a different space. But we talk about regular topics. (Hanni, 47, Bnei Brak)

That is, here one can see the way in which on the one hand Shabbat is dedicated also to the means of significantly limiting the topics that characterize it, with topics like making plans, economic topics, or topics that may lead to arguments and disagreements between the couple being left out of the Shabbat framework. At the same time, one can see that there is a “grey” area in this context, in which topical or non-holy issues can be discussed, either by being held in different physical locations from the Shabbat table or through being integrated into a conversation that includes both Torah and holy topics, which provides the appropriate setting for holy engagements.

# Conclusion

This article has sought to examine three embodied practices that characterize the Haredi Jewish Sabbath in Israel. This has been done to bridge the gap between the space of halachic limitations that apply to these communities and the freedom of action, change and power that are experienced while implementing or interpreting these practices. I emphasized that, via a range of prohibitions and laws, the Jewish religion creates a general embodied system, which Orthodox Haredi Jews receive piously on themselves (Muralidharan, La Ferle & Roth‐Cohen, 2023; Neriya-Ben Shahar, 2017). These laws find significant and unique expression during Shabbat, which Jews are commanded to observe and remember via hundreds of commandments and prohibitions, meticulous laws, customs, and traditions, many of them embodied and instilled in practice, and touching on many private areas of life (Levi, 2004; Hatch & Marks, 2022).

Out of all the areas of prohibitions and limitations, throughout the study I discussed three basic embodied practices on Shabbat: food, dress, and conversation (Bourdieu, 1972). I explained how each of them features halachic limitations. These are practiced rigidly by Haredim, but are experienced as embodied, everyday practices with freedom of interpretation, experience, and space. Among many devout religious people there is pressure that is applied to members of the group to feel and to be seen and to behave authentically, especially when the differences regarding the faith and community of the person are so highly emphasized (Van Der Tol & Gorski, 2022). Therefore, precisely these three basic metrics of dress, food, and conversation constitute a basis for these differences in authentic behaviors, and on the one hand illustrate the price that comes with keeping these laws on Shabbat, and on the other the price that comes with the adoption of this religious knowledge and its physical impact on the practitioner.

Through a qualitative interview-based study I sought to illustrate the way in which the Jewish laws of Shabbat that are adopted by Haredim in Israel aren’t experienced and interpreted as a limitation, but as a free choice rich in embodied nuances. Whether these are clear halachic guidelines regarding the Shabbat meal (Carter, 2020; Zerubavel, 1989), the laws of modesty (Elor, 2010; Taragin-Zeller, 2014), or the halachic prohibition on discussing secular matters throughout Shabbat (Hatch & Marks, 2022), studies show a significant interpretative conception, mostly empowering, of implementing these practices, accepting them, and controlling them. Throughout the article, I explained for example how the Shabbat and its limitations provide the Haredi individual with the possibility of expressing themselves and their personal tastes, of coping with physical limitations, which touch for example on smoking addiction or the possibility of eating in only a limited way, and of “overcoming” them precisely through the Shabbat laws. According to the interviewees, not talking about certain topics on Shabbat increases the chance of realizing future plans and allows the avoidance of annoying or controversial topics during the most precious and intensive family time there is all week. Similarly, Shabbat allows the overcoming, even if temporarily, of different aspects of the laws of modesty, while accepting and permitting the wearing of more expensive clothes that testify to personal taste, preferences, and self-realization.

In each of these areas, it’s precisely the examination of basic embodied practices like eating, dress and conversation that bridges gaps between the acceptance of the halachic restriction and the feeling or practical expression of the restriction. These gaps embody the knowledge of action (Ammerman, 2020) and adopt the point of view involving the severance of moral norms and the liberal secular tools for the purposes of examining religious issues (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Mahmood 2005). In so doing, examining the area of action that exists between the law and the experience of the individual allows a better understanding of the world of the subjects, the role of religious practices, the value that accompanies their adoptions and the ways in which they allow a preservation of religion’s power as a set of tools for managing the lives of many, observant and unobservant alike.

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1. In Israel Shabbat is the official day of rest, and as a result significant portions of the economy are closed. Additional restrictions also apply to public services, for example libraries and informal education centers, public transport, and repairing and developing public infrastructures and factories (Ben-Porat, 2016). While some of these features are unique to the Israeli-Jewish space, changes in the public space and closures of businesses on the day of rest also take place elsewhere around the world. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Both Shalom Aleichemand Eshet Chayil are songs traditionally sung in religious Jewish households on Friday night. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The source of this custom is attributed to the Gemara and it has mainly been adopted by Chabad. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cholent is a dish rich in meat, vegetables and legumes that begins cooking from the start of Shabbat until lunch the next day, between 15 and 20 hours after it was first placed on the hotplate or heated up in the oven. Many of the interviewees described the length of cooking time alongside the combination of ingredients as creating a feeling of fullness, especially because it is eaten extremely early in comparison with lunches on the other days of the week. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)