

Daber Davar: Speech of Shabbat

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**Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology,
Michael Fishbane (2008) (pages 133–134)**

There are two kinds of silence. One of these is natural silence and is characterized by the absence of noise. It is a modulation, a diminishment, a negative valence. The other kind of silence is spiritual and is characterized by potentiality and anticipation. We sense this every time we watch a conductor or an ensemble gesture slightly just prior to the production of sound; and we also sense it during moments of self-collection and focus, before something of significance is said to another person. With respect to music, anticipatory silence helps prepare the self to hear sound sounding; for it focuses attention on the transition from silence to sound. With respect to deliberate speech, silence conveys the ethical potential of words; for it sharpens the transition from inwardness to worldly expression. Prayer may also stand at this juncture of silence and speech. It may do so when one begins to articulate thanks or hope, or prepares to recite a blessing, and thereby affirm a theological dimension of the world. For immediately prior to the onset of prayer or blessing, the self may focus both mind and heart on the content of the words and their reference. This is a spiritually pregnant silence and gives birth to words framed by that silence and infused by it in every aspiration. Entering into articulation in this way is entering into a world brought to expression through language. The sounds of speech are meaningful only through the silences that

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precede them or carry them forward. Otherwise, there would only be din and noise.

Contemplative Prayer, Thomas Merton (1971) (pages 23, 29)

For the monk searches not only his own heart: he plunges deep into the heart of that world of which he remains a part although he seems to have “left” it. In reality the monk abandons the world only in order to listen more intently to the deepest and most neglected voices that proceed from its inner depth...

Whatever one may think of the value of communal celebration with all kinds of song and self-expression — and these certainly have their place — the kind of prayer we here speak of as properly “monastic” (though it may also fit into the life of any lay person who is attracted to it) is a prayer of silence, simplicity, contemplative and meditative unity, a deep personal integration in an attentive, watchful listening of the “the heart.” The response such prayer calls forth is not usually one of jubilation or audible witness: it is a wordless and total surrender of the heart in silence.

Introduction

Creation was initiated through divine speech — *And God said*, “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3). The Torah defines the first human being in the second chapter of Genesis with the phrase *נפש חיה* (a living spirit, Genesis 2:7). Onkelos translates this phrase into Aramaic as “רוח ממלא” — “a speaking spirit.” There are many laws about the parameters of permissible speech during the week. This paper unpacks the question of how we ought to speak on Shabbat.

The more common formulation of this question focuses on when we are permitted to ask a non-Jew to violate Shabbat on our behalf. This article addresses a prior question that we must answer — are we even allowed to talk about or mention a behavior that in and of itself violates Shabbat? The restrictive view reflects a certain notion of the power of speech. The more we imbue our language with the ability to create our environment, the more inclined we

might be towards stringency in this matter. The more lenient approach may reflect a different approach to the nature of speech.

This paper will weave together Halakhic and Aggadic material in an attempt to explore how we might re-imagine our speech on Shabbat. Each section will unpack one or two texts, together with their parallels, to build an argument for why reinvigorating the observance of this relatively minor aspect of the Laws of Shabbat might offer a deeper insight into what Shabbat can be in our lives. There are four sections followed by a conclusion:

1. The Requirement to Make Shabbat Different (*Bavli Shabbat* 113a/b)
2. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's Mother and the Pious Man Taking a Walk (*Yerushalmi Shabbat* 15:3)
3. Talking Politics on Shabbat (*Terumat ha-Deshen*)
4. Idle Chatter and the Nature of Speech (*Magen Avraham*)
5. Conclusion (*Bavli Shabbat* 119b)

1) The Requirement to Make Shabbat Different

The *Bavli* (*Shabbat* 113a/b) says:

<p>תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף קיג עמוד א/ב (ישעיהו נח) וכבדתו מעשות דרכיך. וכבדתו שלא יהא מלבושך של שבת כמלבושך של חול! וכי הא דרבי יוחנן קרי למאניה מכבדותי. מעשות דרכיך שלא יהא הילוכך של שבת כהילוכך של חול. ממצוא חפצך חפצין אסורין חפצי שמים מותרין. ודבר דבר (ע"ב) שלא יהא דבורך של שבת כדבורך של חול. דבור אסור הרהור מותר.</p>	<p>(Isaiah 58) <i>And you shall honor it, not doing your own ways: And you shall honor it that your Sabbath garments should not be like your weekday garments. As Rabbi Yochanan called his garments 'My honorers'. Not doing your own ways that your walking on the Sabbath shall not be like your walking on weekdays. Nor finding your own affairs your affairs are forbidden, the affairs of Heaven [religious matters] are permitted. Nor speaking your own words (page 113b) that your speech [conversation] on the Sabbath should not be like your speech on weekdays. Speaking speech is forbidden but thought [about mundane matters] is permitted.</i></p>
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1. In the א version is slightly different, דר' יוחנן the version is slightly different, דר' יוחנן is here quoted as referring particularly to the clothing he wears on Shabbat.

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It is the last two lines of this passage that interest me — what does it mean that we are meant to speak differently on Shabbat? How does one accomplish this? In fact, if you take the very last phrase on face value it says, “Speech is forbidden, thoughts are permitted.” What does it mean to forbid speech?²

When you take this passage in full, it reflects the power of Shabbat. According to the following midrash all aspects of our daily life — the way we dress, the way we walk and the way we speak — are meant to be different on Shabbat. The unique place of speech is articulated by Rabbi Ephraim Lunshitz (d. 1619) in his masterful commentary on the ten commandments:

כלי יקר שמות פרק כ פסוק יג
וטעמו של דבר הוא לפי שכל פעולות האדם הוא בכלי המעשה שלו אבל פעולת הקדוש ברוך הוא הוא בדיבור לבד ... כשהאדם שובת בשבת ואינו עושה מלאכה בכלי המעשה שלו אין שבתה זו דומה לשביתת הקדוש ברוך הוא. כי הקדוש ברוך הוא שבת אפילו מדיבור פיו והאדם אינו שובת כי אם מפעולת כלי המעשה. על כן נאמר, “דבר דבר שלא יהא דיבורך של שבת כדיבורך של חול” לזכור שביתת הקדוש ברוך הוא אשר שבת מן הדיבור.

And the reason for this matter is that all the activities of people are with their tools of action, however the activities of the Holy One Blessed be He are with speech only... When a person rests on Shabbat and does not engage in any forbidden labor with their tools of action this resting is not like the resting of the Holy One Blessed be He. This is so because the Holy One Blessed be He rests even from the speech of the mouth, and people only rest from their tools of activity. Therefore, the Rabbis said, “*Nor speaking your own words* that your speech [conversation] on the Sabbath should not be like your speech on weekdays” to remember the resting of the Holy One Blessed be He who rested even from speech.

The Kli Yakar claims that there is an important aspect to limiting our speech as it gets us closer to God. The *Mishna Berura*, in commenting on the nature of a successful fast wrote:

2. There is a technical debate between Rashi (ד"ה שלא יהא דיבורך) and Tosafot (ד"ה שלא). Rashi explains that this refers to the prohibition of talking about business on Shabbat. Tosafot learns that prohibition from a prior *drasha* (ממצוא חפצר) and instead quotes the Midrash that I will quote below. See also Rambam *Hil. Shabbat* 24:1.

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משנה ברורה סימן תקעא סעיף קטן ב'
וראיתי כתוב בספר אחד שכשאדם
רוצה להתנדב תענית טוב יותר
שיקבל תענית מן הדבור ממה
שיקבל עליו מן האכילה כי ממנו לא
יהיה לו נזק לא בגופו ולא בנשמתו
ולא יחלש עי"ז וכעין זה כתב הגר"א
באגרתו שצריך האדם לייסר עצמו
לא בתענית וסיגופים כ"א ברוסן פיו
ובתאותיו וזהו התשובה וכו':

And I have seen it written in one book that if someone wants to engage in a voluntary fast that it is better to accept upon themselves a fast-from-speech than from food. This is true because a person will not become weak or damage his body or soul by fasting from speech. And the Vilna Gaon has written something similar in one of his letters, "That a person must cause themselves to suffer, not through fasting and self-mortification but rather through a bridle on your mouth and your desires, and this is repentance."

Here again we see a link made between speech and physical behavior. Withdrawing from speech is understood to serve as a powerful tool for repentance. I would not recommend a regular attempt at a speech-fast every Shabbat, but the idea that limiting our speech can bring us closer to God on Shabbat has some powerful echoes in the Halakhic system.

2) Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai's Mother and the Pious Man taking a walk

The *Yerushalmi* quotes a similar idea about speech, and links us directly back to the creation of the world:

תלמוד ירושלמי מסכת שבת פרק טו
דף עח טור א/ה"ג
אמר רבי אבהו שבת לה' (ויקרא כה:ב)
שבות כה' – מה הקדוש ברוך הוא שבת
ממאמר אף את שבות ממאמר.

Rebbi Avahu said, "Shabbat la-hashem (Leviticus 25:2) *shvot* (cease and desist) *ka-hashem*. Just like the Holy Blessed One desisted from speech [on Shabbat] so too you should desist from speech on Shabbat.

Here, the *Yerushalmi* is clearly seeking to limit speech on Shabbat. Rebbi Avahu says that just as God withdrew from speech on the seventh day, so too must each of us do the same. If creation was accomplished through divine speech, then Shabbat was carved out through divine silence. By limiting our speech, we attempt to walk in God's ways.

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And the *Yerushalmi*³ continues:

מעשה בחסיד אחד שיצא לטייל בכרמו בשבת וראה שם פירצה אחת וחשב לגדרו במוצאי שבת. אמר הואיל וחשבתי לגדרה איני גודרה עולמית. מה פעל לו הקב"ה? (דף עה טור ב/ה"ג) זימן לו סוכה אחת של נצפה ועלת לתוכה וגדרתא ממנה היה ניזון וממנה היה מתפרנס כל ימיו. ⁴	It once happened that a <i>hasid</i> went to take a walk in his vineyard on Shabbat. He saw a breach in his fence and he thought about fixing it after Shabbat. He said, "Since I thought [on Shabbat] about fencing it in, I will never put up that fence." What did the Holy Blessed One do for him? He caused a bush to grow in that spot and fence in the breach. And from that bush he was supported all the days of his life. ⁵
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The presumption of the story in the *Yerushalmi* is that since this man went above and beyond the letter of the law, so too God responded with a miracle above and beyond the confines of nature. Supererogatory behavior is rewarded beyond normative expectations.

And here the *Yerushalmi* concludes:

3. This story of this pious man appears in the *Bavli* as well, *Shabbat* 150a:

תנו רבנן: מעשה בחסיד אחד שנפרצה לו פרץ בתוך שדהו, ונמלך עליה לגודרה, ונזכר ששבת הוא, ונמנע אותו חסיד ולא גדרה. ונעשה לו נס, ועלתה בו צלף וממנה היתה פרנסתו ופרנסת אנשי ביתו.

This story as it appears in the *Bavli* says that our pious friend initially wanted to fix the fence on Shabbat which would certainly be forbidden. In the *Yerushalmi* version his thought was only to fix the fence after Shabbat. When the Rif (דף סד ע"א בדפיו) and the Rosh (פרק כג סימן ה) retell the story they both refer to the *Bavli's* version in which he thought about rebuilding the fence on Shabbat itself.

4. The story also appears in *Vayikra Rabba* (34:16) page תתו in the Margoliyot edition. See note 1 there on page תתו where he points out that the story does not appear in the Leiden ms. of the *Yerushalmi* but appears to have been added in by an editor.
5. See also the Ritva (ד"ה וזכר), the Maharsha (ח"א ד"ה ונמלך) as well as the Taz (א"ח"ה) who deal with the question of what might have been wrong with his idea. In addition, see the Chatam Sofer in his commentary on *Masechet Shabbat* on the story who quotes the ספר הגלגלים who claims that this pious man was a *gilgul* of the stick gatherer who was himself Tzlofchad which explains the miracle of the *tzlaf* bush growing as part of the miracle.

אמר רבי חנינא מדוחק התירו
 לשאול שלום בשבת. אמר רבי
 חייא בר בא רבי שמעון בן יוחי
 כד הוה חמי לאימיה משתעיא
 סגין הוה אמר לה אימא שובתא
 היא. תני אסור לתבוע צרכיו
 בשבת. רבי זעורה שאל לר'
 חייא בר בא מהו מימר רעינו
 פרנסינו? אמר ליה טופוס
 ברכות כך הן.

Rebbi Chanina said, "With difficulty they permitted greeting others on Shabbat." Rebbi Chiyya bar Ba said, "When Rebbi Shimon Bar Yochai saw his mother talking too much he would say to her, 'Mother, it is Shabbat!' It was taught, "It is forbidden to petition for your needs on Shabbat." R. Zeira asked R. Chiya bar Ba, "May we say *shepherd us, sustain us* (the petitionary language of *birkat ha-mazon*)? He replied, "The fixed liturgy is different."⁶

The story about Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai is somewhat complicated. In the *Yerushalmi's* version R. Shimon just tells his mother that it is Shabbat. As it appears in *Vayikra Rabba* (פרשה לד:טז) we are told that she is speaking too much and then R. Shimon tells her that it is Shabbat. The Midrash then uses the word "ושתקא" "and she shut up" to describe his mother's response.⁷ The way that the *Zohar* shares the same story is even more harsh:

זוהר נכר א (בראשית) פרשת בראשית
 דף לב עמוד א
 וכך הוה עביד ר"ש כד חמי לאמיה דהות
 משתעיא הוה אמר לה אמא שתוקי שבת
 הוא ואסיר

And this is what Rebbi Shimon would do when he saw his mother speaking. He would say, "Mother, shut up, it is Shabbat and speech is prohibited."

Here, R. Shimon actually tells his mom to be quiet — or perhaps even tells her to shut up. In each version the story becomes more and more aggressive. In the *Yerushalmi*, R. Shimon just mentions that it is Shabbat. In the Midrash *Vayikra Rabba* we are told that she is quiet. And then, finally, in the *Zohar*, R Shimon tells his mother to be quiet. Why might R. Shimon take this

6. Regarding the practice to recite prayers on behalf of sick people see the *Gemara* in *Shabbat* 12a/b that requires one who visits the sick to say, "שבת היא מלזעוק ורפואה קרובה," "It is Shabbat and we should not call out." See the *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayyim* 288:10, together with Magen Avraham (סק"ד) and *Mishna Berura* (ס"ח) who are not happy with the general practice that takes place in most shuls today. There may be no way to change the public *מיי שברך* for sick people on Shabbat, but it is important to note that it does seem to contravene the *Halakha* as it appears in the books.

7. See the Margoliot ed. page תתט, note 3 where he deals with the different versions of how this word appears in the manuscripts.

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to such an extreme place that he speaks to his mother in a way that seems disrespectful?

To understand this strong Rabbinic language, it may be helpful to look outside the rabbinic canon. In two non-Rabbinic Jewish books from the time of the second Temple the question of speech on Shabbat is raised. In both instances the punishment for violating this rule is the death penalty. Both the Book of Jubilees (chapter 50 verse 8) and the Damascus Document (Chapter 13 verses 2 & 5) codify improper speech as a capital crime.

To be very clear, these texts represent non-Rabbinic Jewish views from between the third century BCE and the first century CE. They pre-date the codification of the *Mishna* by about two hundred to four hundred years. However, when you situate the Rabbinic approach found in the *Yerushalmi*, *Vayikra Rabba*, and the *Bavli* within a broader intellectual context of Jubilees and Qumran, something very important emerges — the Rabbis were being lenient!⁸

Within the rabbinic *sitz im leben* there were Jews who treated the violation of rules regarding speech as a Torah prohibition. The Rabbis, in their codification of the very same laws, treat all of these *dinim* as Rabbinic. The Oral Torah that we inherited is different from the author of the Book of Jubilees.

Were *Chazal* responding directly to these non-Rabbinic traditions? It is impossible to know for sure. However, the rabbinic approach to these specific issues reflect a fundamentally different approach to the nature of speech. The Rabbis want us to speak differently on Shabbat, but that requirement is not raised to the level of a Torah law. How might this play out in a normative, Halakhic question?

8. It is interesting to imagine a continuum from Jubilees and Qumran, to R. Shimon b. Yochai and R. Avahu and then the normative rabbinic position. There is often a mystical overtone to some of the Qumran texts which puts them in conversation with R. Shimon b. Yochai.

3) Talking Politics on Shabbat

There is a fascinating *teshuva* by Rabbi Israel Isserlein⁹ in his work, *Terumat ha-Deshen*, that builds on the story of R. Shimon and his mother regarding what seems like a question that could have been asked today:

תרומת הדשן סימן סא¹⁰
שאלה: מה שנוהגים רוב בני אדם אף המדקדקים במעשיהם, להתאסף ביום השבת לאחר יציאת בהכ"נ, ולספר שמועות מעניני מלכים ושרים וערך המלחמות וכה"ג, יש חשש איסור בדבר או לא?

תשובה: יראה דצריך לדקדק בדבר, דהתוס' (שבת קיג: ד"ה שלא) וכן האשירי (שבת פט"ו ס' ב) כתבו בפי' אלו קשרים, דאסור להרבות בשיחה בטילה בשבת כדמוכח בעובדא דאימא דרשב"י: כדאיתא בויק"ר... וכירושלמי אמרינן דבדוחק וטורח התירו בשאלות שלום בשבת עכ"ל. הא קמן להדיא דאסור להרבות דברים כמו בחול, וכש"כ יותר מבחול.

אמנם אם אותם בני אדם מתענגים בכך, כשמדברים ומספרים שמועות מהמלכים ושרים ומלחמותיהם וכה"ג, כדרך הרבה בני אדם שמתאווים לכך, נראה דודאי שרי...

Question: That which most people, even those who are careful in their observances, gather on Shabbat after the end of services and talk about the rumors regarding kings and princes and the proceedings of war and the like, is there is a concern that this might be forbidden?

Answer: It seems that we need to investigate the matter. Tosafot (*Shabbat* 113b, s.v. *she-lo*) and the Rosh (*Shabbat* 15:2) both wrote that it is forbidden to speak idle chatter on Shabbat as it is clear from the story of R. Shimon b. Yochai's mother as it says in *Vayikra Rabba*... and the *Yerushalmi* says that with difficulty they permitted greeting people on Shabbat. Here we clearly see that it is forbidden to chatter like during the week, and all the more so is it forbidden to speak more than during the week.

However, those people who really enjoy talking and chatting about the kings, the princes, their wars and the like, as many people really desire, it appears that it is certainly permitted.

9. Rabbi Isserlein died around 1460 in lower Austria and had a profound impact on the Rema and the history of Ashkenazi Jewish Law and practice. The Shach (*Yoreh Deah* 196:20) points out that Rabbi Isserlein wrote his own questions and was not responding to questions written by others. This means that the formulation of the question can have Halakhic import.

10. This *teshuva* is cited by the Rema in the *Shulchan Aruch* 307:1 and elaborated upon by the Taz ad loc.

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אמנם ראיתי הרבה פעמים, שמקצת
מאותם בני אדם המתאספים לספר
שמועות הללו, אינם מתענגים בריבוי
שמועות הללו, אלא שעושים כן
לרצון חבריהם הנאספים עמהן כה"ג
נראה דיש חשש איסור לאותן שאין
מתענגים.

Nevertheless I have seen many times that some of the people who gather to talk about these matters do not really enjoy the conversation, rather they do so because their friends who are gathered with them want to talk about politics with them. In this fashion it appears that there is concern for a prohibition for those who do not enjoy.

The question here foregrounds the complexity of this issue. Speaking on Shabbat ought to be different than speaking during the week — but what does that mean? At some level this seems to not simply be about how much we say, but rather the content and tone of our communication. What about areas of discourse that often lead to discord? The *Terumat ha-Deshen* understood that there are certain topics that can be deeply divisive and that should, therefore, be avoided on Shabbat. How many times have we all been at a Shabbat meal that has devolved into a fight over politics?

How might Rabbis imbibe these values when crafting sermons and *divrei Torah* for Shabbat? Does this mean that the Rabbi can never say anything that makes people uncomfortable? Part of the mandate of a religious leader is to encourage their community to think differently about the issues of the day, to offer a Jewish lens with which we can all view the world. This *teshuva* understands that the value of enjoying Shabbat is meant to be taken seriously. However, one person's enjoyment can be another's annoyance.

4) Idle Chatter and the Nature of Speech

Are you allowed to talk about something that can not done in a permissible fashion on Shabbat? Imagine that you are leaving on a midnight flight after Shabbat to Israel, are you permitted to talk about the flight during Shabbat lunch? This question animated many of the classical commentaries on the *Shulchan Aruch*. In addition to weighing the sources to arrive at a clear answer to this question, I would like to evaluate the competing values that are driving the different approaches.

The analysis begins with a short selection from *Masechet Shabbat (Bavli 120b)*:

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אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל מותר לאדם לומר לחבירו לדרך פלוני אני הולך למחר, שאם יש בורגנין הולך. Rav Yehuda said in the name of Shmuel, "A person is permitted to say to his friend, 'I am going to such and such village tomorrow.' Because if there were huts [that extended the *techum*] it would be permitted."

Rashi (ד"ה שאם יש בורגנין) explains that even if the huts are not currently in place, and the village is beyond the *techum*, since this is something that is theoretically permitted one may talk about the journey. The implication of Rashi's comment is that something that is always forbidden — like flying to Israel — could not be discussed.

The Rosh (פרק כג סימן ו) spells out this position:¹¹

הלך כל דבר שיש בו צד היתר שיכול לעשותו בשבת יכול לומר אעשה זה למחר וכן יכול לומר לחבירו עשה לי דבר זה למחר ובלבד שלא יזכיר לו שכירות. ודבר שאין לו היתר לעשות היום אפילו אין בו אלא איסורא דרבנן אסור לומר אעשה דבר זה למחר או לומר לחבירו עשה לי. Therefore, any matter that has a way to be permissible on Shabbat you can say that you will do this tomorrow. And you can also ask your friend to do this for you tomorrow, as long as you don't arrange a rental fee. But something that can never be permitted today [on Shabbat], even if it is only a rabbinic violation, you may not say that you will do this today nor may you ask your friend to do this on your behalf.

This approach understands the prohibition of דבר דבר — *daber davar* — as outlawing talking about any behavior that is always prohibited. This idea reflects back to the opening passage from *Shabbat* 113a/b that the way we speak on Shabbat is meant to be different. That somehow our speech is treated almost like a physical act. The Maharasha (d. 1631), Rabbi Shmuel Eidels, (חידושי אגדות) (שבת דף קיג ע"ב ד"ה דבורך) formulates this with a seductive idea:

וענינו שהדבור במלאכת שבת כמעשה... And the idea is that talking about prohibited labor is like an action.

Because the original act of creation was divine speech, that same act takes on a different standing on Shabbat for human beings. The imperative to walk in God's ways transforms the speech act from a passive experience into an active

11. Tosafot on the page (ד"ה אבל), the Piskei ha-Rid (ד"ה אמר), and the Tur (או"ח שו) all echo this same approach.

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moment. The power of words is that they create reality. This kind of creativity needs to be limited on Shabbat.

There is, however, another approach. The Magen Avraham (א"ח"ש"ז סק"א) outlines four *rishonim* that he claims all maintain that simply talking about something that is always prohibited, as long as no one is being asked even implicitly to participate, is permissible.

He begins by arguing that the Ramban (שבת קנ: ד"ה הא) and Rashba (שבת (פכ"ד מהל' שבת הלק ג) as quoted in the Magid Mishneh (קנ: ד"ה הא)¹² both explain the statement of Rav Yehuda in the name of Shmuel in the same way. Here is the Ramban:

הא דאמרין מותר לאדם לומר לחבירו לכרך פלוני אני הולך למחר. לאו דוקא שיאמר כן בלחוד דהגדה זו לא מהני ולא מעלה. אלא אפי' אומר לו "לשם אני הולך לך עמי" מותר.	That which we said, "A person is permitted to say to his friend, 'I am going to such and such village tomorrow.'" This does not only mean that you can say just this, for such a speech act accomplished nothing [and is obviously permitted]. Rather, even to say, "I am going to such and such place, come with me" is permitted.
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One might infer from this passage that if, and only if, there is a request made of a third party is such talk prohibited. Therefore, if a person were just chatting about their plans for after Shabbat, even if they were referring to something that is always prohibited, such a conversation would be allowed. This reading is not very compelling, and many are not convinced.

However, the Magen Avraham continues to make his argument, this time marshalling an inference from the Rambam at the beginning of the twenty fourth chapter of *Hilkhot Shabbat*:

לפיכך אסור לאדם להלך בחפציו בשבת ואפילו לדבר בהן כגון שידבר עם שותפו מה ימכור למחר או מה יקנה או היאך יבנה בית זה ובאי זה סחורה ילך למקום פלוני.	Therefore, it is forbidden for a person to walk after his [financial] needs on Shabbat. And even just to talk about them — like talking with your partner about what you might sell tomorrow or buy or how you might build...
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The Magen Avraham claims that particularly when two business partners are

12. The Ritva (שבת קנ: ד"ה אמר) has the same approach to the *sugya* but the Magen Avraham did not have access to this text.

seeking advice one from the other, the conversation is problematic. However, two friends just chatting about their own investments is perhaps permitted.

He then goes on to quote a section from the Rokeach (*Siman* 133, from *Hil. Shabbat*) that appears in the *Beit Yosef* (307) and makes a specific inference:

<p>בית יוסף אורח חיים סימן שז כתוב ברוקח (סי קלג¹³) אינו יכול לומר אני חפץ לרכוב למחר כי איני [אולי צ"ל אינו] יכול להשכיר בשבת עכ"ל ונראה לי דבאומר לו כן כדי שיזמין לו סוס לרכוב עליו מייד.</p>	<p>It is written in Rokeach (133): He may not say, "I want to ride tomorrow." Because he may not rent [a horse] on Shabbat. And it appears to me that [it is forbidden] because we are dealing with a case when he says it to him in order that he will arrange for him a horse to ride on.</p>
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The inference that the Magen Avraham makes in this case is that it is only forbidden to talk about going for a ride on a horse in the presence of someone from whom you might actually rent a horse. The implication is that if there were no one around from whom you might be able to hire a horse, that just mentioning that you are going on a ride is permissible. The Magen Avraham has brought together the Ramban, Rashba, Rambam and Rokeach as read by the *Beit Yosef* as a group of *rishonim* who all maintain that one may mention behaviors that are prohibited as long as there is no request for action on the part of another.

The Halakhic language for the lenient position is that simple idle chatter (סיפור דברים בעלמא) as long as there is no invitation or request (תועלת) is permitted. According to this position I could talk about how I am getting to the airport for my flight to Tel Aviv as long as I am not, even implicitly, trying to arrange for a ride to the airport with someone at my table. By stringing together this group of *rishonim* the Magen Avraham created a position that *achronim* feel a need to respond to in one way or another.¹⁴

This approach does not see anything wrong in just talking about behavior that is fundamentally prohibited. Perhaps the debate between Rosh and Ramban (as understood by the Magen Avraham) is really about the deeper

13. ספר הרוקח הלכות שבת סימן קלג- מותר לאדם לומר לדרך פלוני אני חולך למחר. אין יכול לומר לגוי, "אני חפץ לרכוב למחר." כי אינו יכול להשכיר בשבת.

14. See the comments of the *Peri Megadim*, *Eshel Avraham*, the *Machatzit ha-Shekel* and the *Levushei Serad* directly on the Magen Avraham (307:2). See also *Elya Rabba* 307:22.

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question of the nature of the speech act on Shabbat. The Rosh, as fleshed out by the Maharsha, understood that human speech is so creative that it is akin to a physical act on Shabbat. The Ramban is perhaps claiming that speech should be understood in a more limited fashion as 'just' an expression of human will or desire.

The majority position of the Rosh is codified in the *Shulchan Aruch* (307:8).¹⁵ Both the *Mishna Berura*¹⁶ and the *Aruch ha-Shulchan*¹⁷ reject the Magen Avraham's approach to the *rishonim*. In the final analysis, the more lenient position only exists within the Magen Avraham's read of the Ramban, Rashba, Rambam, and Beit Yosef's approach to the Rokeach.

5) Conclusion

The *Gemara* in *Shabbat* (119b) makes an even more direct link between speech and action:

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף קיט עמוד ב	Rebbi Elazar said, "From where do we know that speech is like an action? As it says
אמר רבי אלעזר מניין שהדיבור כמעשה? שנאמר בדבר ה' שמים נעשו.	<i>Through the word of God, the heavens were created."</i>

This statement appears embedded in a *sugya* about the *tefilot* of Shabbat.¹⁸ While it is possible to read R. Elazar's statement very broadly, for the purposes of this paper I am mainly interested in how this idea impacts our Shabbat observance.

15. This position has important implications for the more limited question of asking a non-Jew to violate Shabbat on your behalf. One would have to say that in any instance in which one is permitted to ask a non-Jew to do something that violates Shabbat that the prohibition of דבר דבר is simply lifted. This works well with one of Rashi's approaches to the prohibition of אמירה as he sees it as based on דבר דבר, see Rashi עבודה זרה דף טו עמוד א ד"ה כיון דזבנה קנייה. However, Rashi מסכת שבת דף קנג עמוד א, ד"ה מאי טעמא שרי ליה למיתב לנכרי שליחות. This reason raises all sorts of questions about the nature of agency. In addition, see the Rambam (פ"ו מהל' שבת הל' א) who offers yet a third approach.

16. See *Mishna Berura* 307:36 together with the *Biur Halakha* אעשה *Biur Halakha* ד"ה וכן לא יאמר אעשה.

17. See *Aruch ha-Shulchan* 307:21–24.

18. See the Klausenberger Rebbe, Rabbi Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam in his דברי יציב קה דברי יציב קה who makes this point.

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The Shelah, R. Isaiah Horowitz (d. 1630), quotes this passage and points out that Rashi is quiet. He then explains the *Gemara* in this way:

של"ה מסכת שבת פרק נר מצוה – סג.
ובבחינת סור מרע, דהיינו לא תעשה
– בדיבור.
ונראה לי דהפירוש הוא כך, כשם
שצריך לשובת ממלאכות, כן צריך
לשובת מהדיבור... והנה הקדוש ברוך
הוא לא עשה במעשה רק בדיבור,
שנאמר (תהלים לג:ו) 'בדבר ה' שמים
נעשו', ומזה הדיבור שבת, שמע מינה
שצריך לשובת מהדיבור כמו ממעשה.

And it seems to me that the explanation is as follows — just as we must cease from forbidden labor, so too we must cease from speech... And behold the Holy One Blessed be He did not create through action, rather only through speech, as it says (Tehillim 33:6) *Through the word of God, the heavens were created* and from this [type of] speech God rested. We learn from this that we must cease from speech just as we cease from action.

The Shelah, Maharsha, and Kli Yakar¹⁹ all make similar comments about the nature of speech, particularly on Shabbat. In many ways their approach is built on the *Yerushalmi*'s simple connection to God's ceasing from speech as creation on Shabbat. We can each walk in God's ways by simply taking more care in the way that we speak on Shabbat.

Our religious lives are filled with words — prayers recited three times a day, *berachot* over food. What might it look like to attempt to limit our greatest human gift, the gift of speech, for twenty five hours a week. Learning to be more careful about the way we engage with language over Shabbat will impact our experience of that day and, please God, the entire week.

The two opening quotes from Fishbane and Merton serve as a reminder of what a prayer filled Shabbat might look like. For Merton, the monastic experience was not meant to remove a person from the world entirely but served to propel the individual to hear the suffering of the world and leap into action. Fishbane beautifully outlines the power of anticipatory silence, of holding back, so that you can leap into connection.

May we all be blessed to experience the silence and the joy of Shabbat.

19. All three of whom died within fifteen years of one another, between 1619 and 1631. These early seventeenth century Jewish thinkers pre-dated any talk of the twentieth century analytic philosophers who developed the notion of speech-act and communication.