

Slower is Better

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

Seeing something I have written in print always evokes the wish that I could snatch the words back, if only for a moment, to correct or change them. Manuscripts of notable novels and poems are almost always indecipherable squiggles, cross-outs, arrows, editing marks. Second, third and fourth thoughts are essential for clarity and elegance of expression. As the great Thomas Mann put it, "A writer is someone for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people."

But the Internet puts a premium on speed. To blog is to blurt. Quick, you got an email, so respond. If you were responding in a letter, you might take time to think and think again. Speed is the friend of reaction and the enemy of thought.

For years I played tournament chess. The first move that occurs to a player is rarely the best move. Chessplayers learn to sit on their hands, to force themselves to slow down. I fear we are raising a generation that has never learned to sit on its hands. Our children are learning to respond instantly rather than thoughtfully, and assume spontaneity is always to be preferred over deliberation. At times the true path is the one requiring patience.