

# Answer Now!

**BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE**

In his book *Representative Men* Emerson tells a helpful story about Napoleon: He directed his one-time secretary Bourrienne to leave all letters unopened for 3 weeks, and then “observed with satisfaction how large a part of the correspondence had thus disposed of itself, and no longer required an answer.”

As someone who steadily answers emails lest the queue become unbearably long, I wonder at the steely self-discipline required to leave that mail unanswered. If Napoleon could manage that, world conquest was probably a trifle.

The more reliable we are, the more we are imprisoned by the expectation of reliability. When someone always responds promptly, a slight delay seems insulting. The psalmist tells us that a thousand years is a day in God’s sight. In the world of electronic communication it is the reverse — a day seems like a thousand years. So, infuriating as it may be to the punctual, perhaps the procrastinators have the right idea: at least they lower the bar of expectation. You don’t have to answer right away if everyone knows you never answer right away.

In our world when texts ping and facebook messages startlingly appear, should we see if delay will sort the important from the insistent? Of course, Napoleon lost at Waterloo because the Prussians showed up — just in time.