Maimonides on extremes

Today is the 22nd day of Tebet, 5771

Maimonides (Rambam) writes in Hilkhot De’ot Ch. 1, that we all have different personalities and tendencies.
To illustrate, Maimonides brings a few examples of extreme character traits:

There are people who are constantly angry, they would explode for any small thing. From the other side, there are individuals who are so cold and indifferent, that nothing moves them to anger. There are people who are so greedy, nothing is ever enough for them. Others, are materially conformist with very few desires in their heart. There is a very proud man and one who is extremely humble.

These behaviors, explains Maimonides, are some times a product of our genetic build-up and sometimes they are acquired seeing our friends, family members, etc. . With time they become an integral part of our personalities.

Maimonides asserts that in this area, the good path is the middle path. The path which is equidistant from both extremes.

Anger, should be reserved for very special circumstances and only when by showing anger we will help to avoid something bad from happening again. Greed, should be balanced: desire all what you need, not all what you want. Don’t be stingy, neither ostentatious.

“This is the path of the wise man. Every man whose character is balanced and moderated, is considered a wise man (chakham)”

As a good doctor, Maimonides does not end just by telling us what is right and what is wrong. He will also teach us, next week, how to get to (and stay in) the middle path.

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Rabbi Yosef Bitton. YMJC | 130 Steamboat Rd. | Great Neck | NY | 11024