MUSAR: Maimonides on Anger Management

In Hilkhot De'ot (the rules of good behavior), Chapter 1, Maimonides describes his famous theory of the "middle way". According to Maimonides, we all have habits or behaviors, innate or acquired, which sometimes tend to be extreme. And then, Maimonides explains, our challenge is to move towards a middle ground, equidistant from both extremes, a place of balance (derekh haemtsai). In Chapter 2, two exceptions to this rule are described. Two habits in which one should not aspire to be in the center, but in the opposite extreme. One of them is anger (the other one is "pride"). Based on what the rabbis of the Mishna taught in Pirqe Abot, Maimonides explains that anger is "exceptionally bad" and therefore "it is right and proper to completely stay away from anger, taking the opposite end.". Maimonides says that we can "never" be angry, to the point of losing our temper. We must always be in full control of our rage and never react aggressively, furious.

Maimonides recognizes that it is sometimes necessary to "pretend" anger. In his own words: "If a person feels that in order to inspire respect in his children … [or students] …. or [in the members] community, if he is a community leader … he should express his outrage to encourage them to return to the right path … [he could do that];.. but, internally, he should always stay calm. In certain circumstances, one can act like he is angry, but never really be angry. "

There are circumstances that require, for example, that we raise our voice to express our opposition to something wrong, avoid wrongdoing, rebuke our students, etc. According to Maimonides, we could then communicate our discomfort with the strength and passion necessary. On one condition: inside, we must remain calm. We can never loss our minds.

Maimonides' words remind me of what I read about the 2004 Tsunami in the Indian Ocean, which destroyed hundreds of cities and killed more than 230,000 people. The article talked about of a group of divers who were in the sea when the ferocious tsunami unleashed. Despite the great force and fury that was taking place in the sea surface, in the ocean, there

was almost no uproar. People who were diving there did not realized that a tsunami crossed over their heads. Because under the surface, the ocean is always calm.
Anger, if necessary, should only be superficial. Faked. Controlled. In this sense, Maimonides asserts that we have to position ourselves in the extreme. We can not adopt a “middle way” between anger and calm, losing our minds just half the time. Within us, we must maintain our calm and be in control “always”. No exceptions.
Maimonides ends: *“Therefore, the rabbis have told us to distance ourselves from rage [towards the opposite end], and train ourselves to never react [impulsively], even under circumstances that should arouse our anger This is the right path [concerning anger management].”*