

Passion and Wisdom

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

Everyone decries extremism, but it is hard to turn out crowds for moderation. The satiric Czech novelist Hašek once started a political movement called "The Party of Moderate Progress Within the Bounds of the Law." If you've never heard of it that is because it never quite picked up steam.

Passion moves us to action yet makes a poor partner to wisdom. Extremism in all its forms is a more vital and exciting alternative even if its effects are dire. William James began his essay *The Moral Equivalent to War* as follows: "The war against war is going to be no holiday excursion or camping party. The military feelings are too deeply grounded to abdicate their place among our ideals until better substitutes are offered than the glory and shame that come to nations as well as to individuals."

Religion is both an offender and an aid in the battle of human passions. Faith engages emotions, at times thoughtlessly. Yet Judaism counsels humility, so we know that our fervor may be misguided; reminds us of our imperfections, lest we trust our own conclusions too much; and counsels goodness, so that in our zeal we do not ignore the most important consideration, the infinite worth of others. Feel deeply and act kindly — not easy but essential.