

Anger

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

Anger, say the sages, is like a bubbling pot; you cannot tell where it will spill or whom it will scald. Anger knots the stomach, heats the head, and forces cruel words from our mouths. When our anger calms we cannot always believe what we have done in moments of rage.

One of the realities of life that we should learn as we grow older is that our feelings will change. In time anger will cool. Other perspectives will emerge. But the peril of anger is that it has the capacity to drive out all other feelings for the time when we are in its grip. And in those moments it can change things forever. That is why the childhood bromide of counting to ten before speaking is so useful. Even a short delay can help restore some equilibrium.

Gladiators, wrote Seneca, were protected by their skill but left defenseless by their anger. This is the truth of the sages' bubbling pot — not only can anger spill over to hurt others, but it can injure oneself. The Torah teaches that God is slow to anger (Num. 14:18) — a model worth taking to heart.