

Rabbi David Wolpe's

# *Off The Pulpit*

January 8, 2015

## **Watching the Detectives**

I am a great fan of mystery novels. I have read more than I can count, along with books about the history of the genre, and have many favorites. Part of the joy is that mysteries both illuminate extremes of human character and satisfy our craving for justice, usually with a clever puzzle thrown in. From Poe's Dupin, often reckoned the first fictional detective, through Holmes and the golden age of Bentley, Christie, and up to Rex Stout, PD James, Connolly and Jo Nesbo today, the detective usually represents, however imperfectly, the thirst for what is right.

Of course there is almost always a murder. The detective seeks justice but the plot is predicated on injustice. You cannot open a mystery novel and assume you will find well adjusted families and honest businesses and whistle

clean characters. The mystery novel at its heart is very Jewish: the world is always broken and restoring what we can is our task. The detective in this sense is generalized to each Jew: we are deputized to find the wrong and seek to redress it, with tools of reason, intuition and right conduct. "Justice, justice you shall pursue" we are told (Deut. 16:20). It is our task to rise from lethargy and make the world better; as Holmes would say, the game is afoot.

Rabbi Wolpe's new book *David: The Divided Heart* is available now.