

It's Illogical

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

Pure logic. Sherlock Holmes and Star Trek's Mr. Spock remind us of their blinding power. The stories are contrived but convincing — if only we could reason like that! Yet some marvelous books of mystery fiction depend upon the masterful detective getting things wrong. In Knox's *The Viaduct Murder*, and most famously, E.C. Bentley's *Trent's Last Case* the detective follows a very careful train of argument, meticulously reasoned, and is proved entirely mistaken. Spock too sometimes misfires. And then of course, there is Sheldon on "The Big Bang Theory." So logical, so often wrong.

Logic is a shaky tool in human affairs. As Koheleth puts it: "God made men straight, but they have engaged in too much reasoning" (Eccl. 7:29).

That is a striking adage for a tradition devoted to intellect and analysis. Still, syllogisms have limits; does anyone really suppose that professors of logic are on the whole more effective or exact in their reading of human nature than stonemasons or poets?

Logic is neat, but life is messy. Judaism esteems argument and inquiry: we even include the rules of Talmudic reasoning in our morning prayers. Yet life is incalculable, confounding, and wondrous. Logic yields to wisdom. Thank God.