And for all the strong hand. (34:12)

The Torah closes with a brief note of praise for the prophetic powers of Moshe Rabbeinu. Since his epitaph is "his strong hand," a reference to his breaking the Luchos, Tablets, upon which were inscribed the Ten Commandments, it seems that this brave act was the climax of Moshe's entire existence. Horav Eliyahu Munk, zl, perceives the lesson it conveys: A forceful, authoritative, gesture by a responsible leader can have a far greater beneficial effect than all of the preaching about orders or discipline. Moshe's angry reaction instantly succeeded in setting the record straight. The people were in a quandary, deeply compromised, not really knowing which way to turn. Moshe showed them the way in a decisive manner, one which they would never forget.

Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, derives a somewhat difficult lesson. He quotes Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, who was wont to say that he who is unable to close a yeshivah has no right opening one. At times, one must apply the "brakes" to an endeavor and close it down. We must battle to uphold the sanctity of Torah; we must be ethical and pious – but there are times when the fray becomes too dangerous and it is better to desist, to back out, to remove oneself from the battle.

Chazal say that Tamar and the wife of Potifar, both acted l'shem Shomayim, for the sake of Heaven. Tamar acted in a manner which appears to be inappropriate, but when it meant humiliating Yehudah, she backed down. She knew when to apply the brakes. Potifar's wife acted inappropriately, but her objective was noble. Yet, when she saw that Yosef did not share her goals, she acted like a woman scorned. She did not know when to stop.

Moshe knew that the Luchos did not belong in the possession of the Jewish People under the circumstances in which they presently found themselves. He broke the Luchos, because he understood that it no longer was the appropriate time to give them to the people. One does not just "do" something. If it cannot be done correctly, it should not be done at that time.