

Strong enough to be weak

By Ruth Ostrow

"MOVE with me; I'm strong enough to be weak in your arms," goes the chorus in a song by hip-hop artist Neneh Cherry. The concept is a good one. I am strong enough to show you my vulnerability, to be honest in my pain, to come forward in my fragility and not hide behind the facade of strength ? which can only ever be temporary because sooner or later we all feel small and afraid.

It's a concept that has come to mind during the past few weeks. The news has been so bad, so devastatingly bad, I have often felt too weak and overwhelmed to even call friends. Recently, when someone kicked a poor, innocent labrador to death, it was the last straw.

Having just finished reading about terrorist attacks, wars, and a reign of violence in our own suburbs involving harm to children – this humble story somehow got deep into the crevices of my soul, behind the barriers I put up to keep myself safe.

The idea of an adoring pet, the companion of a disabled child, happily following a stranger down the street only to be set upon and kicked to death, just broke my heart.

It was a metaphor for every one of us who – with wagging tail and optimism – goes out into the world each day, often to be thwarted. I felt so forlorn, I just let the phone ring and ring and eventually took myself to bed to hide under the covers in the middle of the afternoon.

I could hear my inner voice criticising me for being so weak and unable to face the world. But then I heard the words of that song in my head and I realised that perhaps it's brave and courageous to finally cave in from the weight of suffering we're forced to watch or endure every day. Perhaps to be sodden with grief in the face of terrible inhumanity is a form of inner strength.

I am strong enough to be openly weak. Perhaps from that vulnerability can come a "truth speaking" that may lead one person – so unhappy or brutalised that he or she has to kill a dog or harm a child – to come forward and ask for help instead. Only by allowing vulnerability in ourselves can we make room for it in others – who, instead of lashing out in shame, may reveal the strength of their own helpless fragility.

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