We've all heard it too many times to count: Happiness is not a product of money, of success, or of other things outside ourselves. It's true that some level of comfort and security is necessary, but beyond that, happiness seems to be determined more by the tone of our inner lives, which we cultivate by our thoughts.

There's a saying by Emerson, "Be careful what you set your heart upon, for you shall surely have it." Like any good piece of wisdom, this can be taken many ways. From my current perch, I realize that if you set your sites on accomplishing outward goals (even noble ones) and leave your inward garden untended, you will find yourself outwardly blessed, but also inwardly vulnerable and eventually impoverished.

Thus attention to our inner life must also be given. Along these lines, I'd add to Emerson's saying: "And be careful what you set your thoughts upon, for they determine your inward life." The power of thought is one of The Buddha's favorite topics, who would go a step further and say that your thoughts determine your reality, period. Either way, your thoughts deserve attention.

I am not a philosopher or theologian, so my knowledge of human thought along these lines is shallow, but it seems to me that it's this juxtaposition that defines 'the human condition': on the one hand, we
are driven toward outward achievement through our hard-wired, evolutionary, competitive drive; while on the other hand, we are a unique species in that we have a separate and distinct inner life whose state at any given moment determines our happiness. In observing both myself and others, it seems clear that we ignore either at our peril.

For me, one thing that has characterized the last seven years is achievement, establishing myself, and a comfortable life for my family. And although it has not been complete, I have neglected my inner life. And this bent of mind is something I brought with me to New Zealand, where my focus has been on getting out and doing as much as I can. I don't regret this, because we've had some great experiences, but it's become clear that my inward garden requires attention.

Let the gardening begin.