

BE WARY OF WOODEN HORSES



Why do we have high standards for Church activities? So that inappropriate influences do not injure us from within.

BY ELDER KENNETH JOHNSON

Of the Seventy

Have you noticed how our surroundings can influence our actions and affect our behavior?

I recall, as a young college student, participating in a discussion with an instructor who made reference to research concerning the effects of environment on productivity in the workplace. He reported that some environments encouraged employees to work with greater energy and industry while other environments had an adverse effect. The thought that these seemingly simple things could have such an influence was of great interest to me.

He also spoke of an experiment conducted with a group of people sitting at a table ready to enjoy the meal that had been placed before them. Though each of the participants was hungry and expressed a desire to eat the food, their appetites were affected dramatically by changing the lighting in the room. Following a change in the lighting, many did not eat at all, others ate very little, and, surprisingly, none of the participants enjoyed the meal.

To think that appetizing food would lose its appeal simply because the room lighting

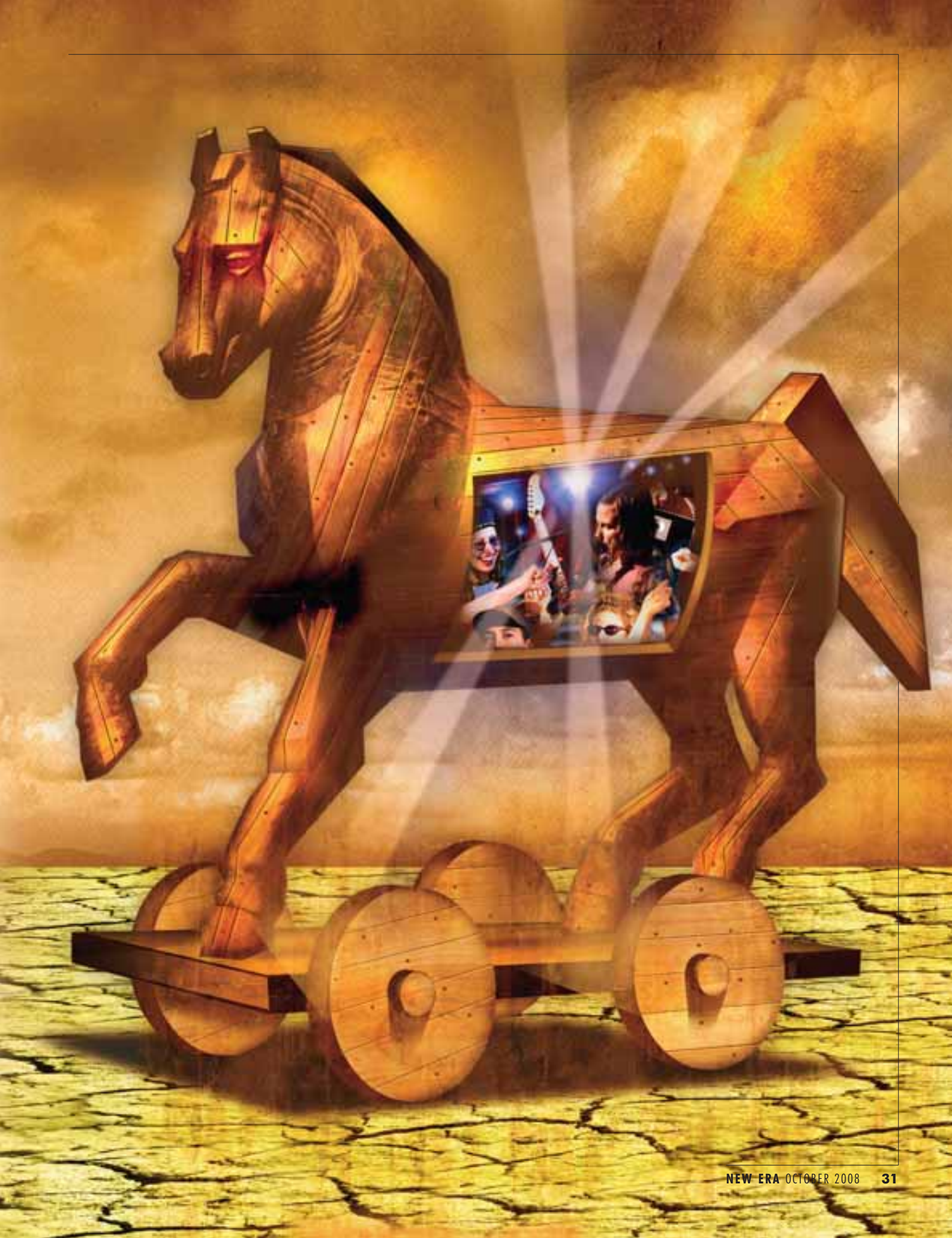
had changed indicates the possible impact and influence of the environment on our behavior.

Many years later, in pursuit of my business career, I was invited by a client to provide insurance coverage for a new venture he was launching. When I arrived at the location, I learned that it was to be a nightclub.

As we passed through reception, entering the main area, I was impressed by the decor. The furnishings and fittings, curtains and carpeting were well coordinated, providing a most pleasing setting. This was not what I had expected to find after having been told the purpose for which the venue was to be used. As I sat with the proprietor, noting the necessary information, an employee approached and asked if he could test the systems.

My client gave his approval. Suddenly the serene setting was transformed as the room lighting faded to be replaced by flashing lights of multiple colors and excessively loud music. The scene of tranquility was immediately shattered.

It was impossible to communicate under such circumstances, so we walked back to the reception area. Following further



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discussion and because of what I had experienced, I did not feel comfortable to proceed, so I referred my client to a specialist in this field of insurance. To this day I vividly recall the dramatic transformation that occurred with shafts of light and the pulsating beat of loud music penetrating the darkened room.

I learned a lasting lesson from these experiences. Our surroundings can have a significant impact on how we feel and the way we behave.

This is one reason our leaders have counseled that every Church-sponsored activity should be held in an environment where the Spirit of the Lord can be present. Think about this counsel. Now think about our Church activities. What can we do to fulfill the Lord's purpose with regard to wholesome and uplifting Church activities?

The Trojan Horse

Since my youth I have been intrigued with the Greek legend of the Trojan horse. You will probably recall that the Grecian army had besieged the city of Troy for 10 years without being able to breach the impenetrable fortifications.

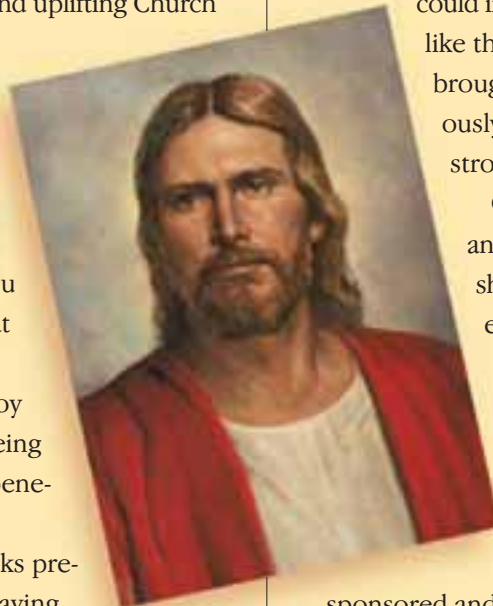
Eventually the Greeks pretended to withdraw, leaving behind them a large wooden horse with a raiding party concealed inside. The Trojans believed the horse to be a good omen and, against the advice of

some, brought it within the city walls. During the night the Grecian warriors emerged from their hiding place and opened the city gates, allowing the Grecian army to enter and conquer Troy.

We also must be on guard against forces that are conspiring to breach our defenses with the intent to destroy our shield of faith! Our homes and places of worship can provide a refuge from the storm caused by elements of inappropriate worldliness, enabling us to "be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works" (Mosiah 5:15) and to always "stand in holy places" (D&C 45:32).

Failing to be on guard may cause some to lose spiritual sensitivity as they tolerate unwholesome music and inappropriate activities. Allowing such things could injure us from within, like the wooden horse being brought into what had previously been an invincible stronghold.

Our objective in planning and preparing activities should not be to imitate or emulate the fashions of the world but to provide an environment where the Spirit of the Lord can abide. This applies whenever or wherever an activity is Church sponsored and should be our guide when choosing what movies to watch, computer programs to browse, or other leisure pursuits to engage in. We should give particular consideration to events involving





the use of Church buildings, as they are dedicated and set apart for activities that are “virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy” (Articles of Faith 1:13).

If the Savior were to attend an activity at a Church meetinghouse, would His response be comparable to when He cast the money changers out of the temple at Jerusalem (see Matthew 21:12–13)? Or would He, like Peter at the Mount of Transfiguration, express the sentiment: “It is good for us to be here” (Matthew 17:4)?

President Gordon B. Hinckley’s (1910–2008) counsel concerning qualifications for full-time missionary service applies to this topic: “I am confident that raising the bar on eligibility will cause our young people, particularly our young men, to practice self-discipline, to live above the

low standards of the world, to avoid transgression and take the high road in all their activities.”¹

With these words in mind, let each of us determine to plan and participate in wholesome activities by raising the bar and pushing back the world.

Will this approach restrict the enjoyment in and eliminate expressions of happiness from our social gatherings? Not at all! In fact, the opposite will be true. Through raising the standard we will enjoy experiences that cultivate lasting memories, consistent with the promise of the great plan of happiness. **NE**

NOTE

1. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Missionary Service,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, Jan. 2003, 17.

