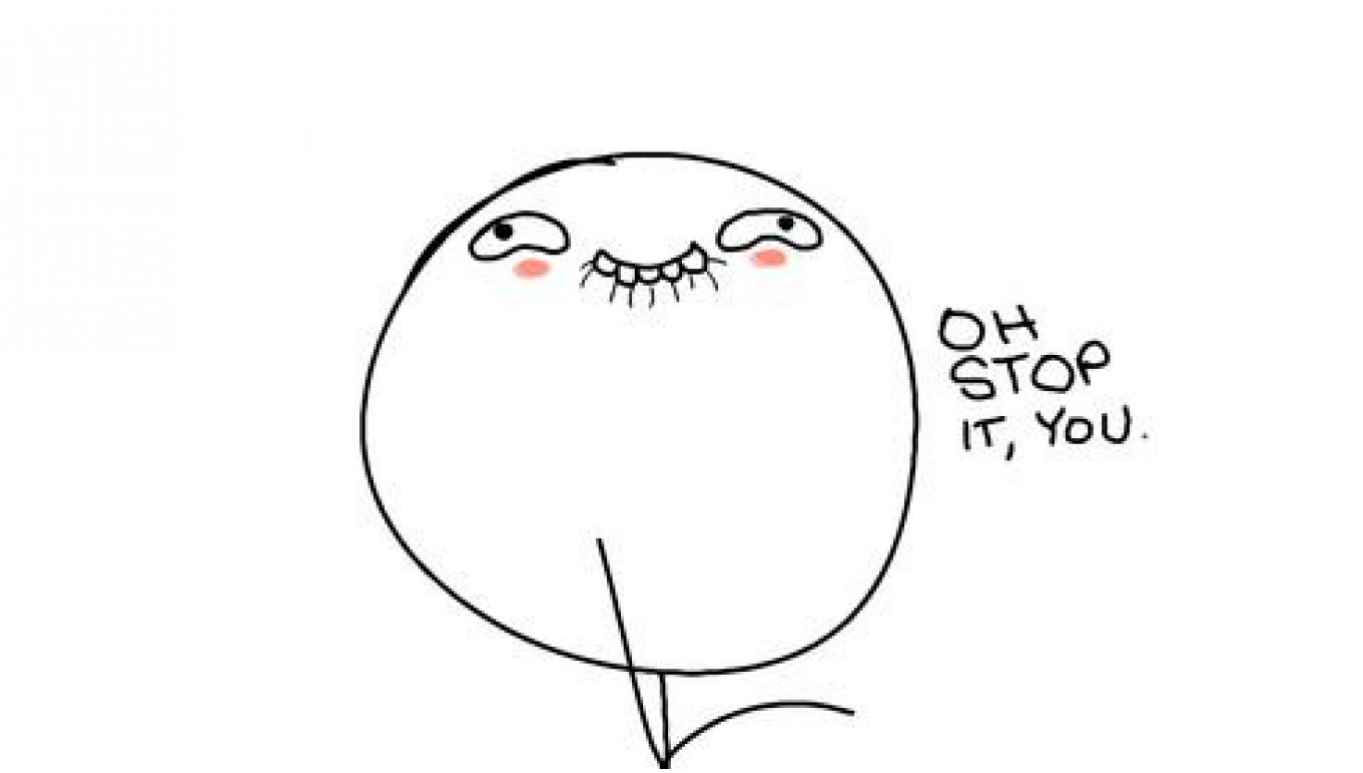
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Moderation, Russian-Style

By Michele A. Berdy

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Умеренность: temperance

Over the▣years I've paid particular attention to the key words and concepts in Russian▣culture, since in order to have a hope of fitting in, foreigners need to know not just what a word means, but where it▣is on the Russian value chart.
That is, you need to know
that гордыня is pride, but also that Russians consider it the worst of the семь грехов (the▣seven sins).

I first started writing about the (Russian) sins, but gave short shrift to добродетели (virtues). Let's face it: good▣behavior is a snooze.
I did get through усердие (diligence) and смирение
(humility), however, and now▣it's time to consider
умеренность (moderation, temperance).
It's a good virtue for January, the month of new fitness club memberships.

In the Russian▣list of sins and virtues,

умеренность counters обжорство (gluttony) and is
sometimes▣replaced by the stricter
воздержание (restraint, abstinence).

I think▣it's fair to say that
умеренность doesn't come easy to Russians, who tend to value
big and generous▣emotions, personalities, appetites, and heck — even novels (Leo Tolstoy, I'm▣looking at you).
Умеренность▣is
умение человека быть хозяином своих чувств,
желаний, влечений (a person's ability to be master of his or her▣emotions, desires and inclinations). Russians support it on the macro level: Именно умеренность
и▣аккуратность могли бы спасти русскую нацию
(Moderation and precision are what's
needed to save the Russian nation.)▣And
on the micro-level:▣Главное для похудения ▣ это
умеренность и сила воли! (To lose weight you must have moderation and▣will power!)

But at least some Russians believe that too much temperance is also not▣a good thing: Человек должен быть умеренным даже в своей умеренности (A person has to be moderate even in moderation.) So▣have a slice of chocolate cake — but just one.

That said, some people of moderation have a trait that is one of Russian▣culture's highest values: скромность▣(modesty). Being modest is a Very Good Thing in Russian▣culture: Скромность украшает человека (Modesty adorns a person.) A person who is highly successful but modest▣is highly admirable:
Наш профессор принял награждение с
благородной скромностью истинного▣профессионала (Our professor accepted the award with the noble modesty of a▣true professional.)

In fact, sometimes you don't get ahead in the world by being pushy, but▣by being modest: Он скромно опускал ресницы, зная, что скромность ему к лицу... "Этот мальчик далеко пойдёт!" ▣ говорили про
него в детстве. (He modestly lowered his eyes, knowing that▣modesty made him more attractive. "That boy will go far," people said about him▣when he was little.)

And the desire to appear modest might even influence speech patterns: Говорить "мы" ▣ это признак скромности. (Saying "we"▣is a sign of modesty.)

But скромность has to be genuine; false modesty is a Bad Thing that must be cast▣off: Отбросив ложную скромность, можно подчеркнуть, что журнал наш всё же
гораздо больше хвалят, чем ругают (Putting▣aside false modesty, I'd like to stress that our magazine gets more praise than▣criticism.)

And that Russian tendency to present oneself modestly can be a problem▣for job seekers in other cultures, like the U.S. As the writer Sergei Dovlatov▣discovered and wrote: Скромность в Америке не является первоочередной▣добродетелью.(In America modesty isn't the number one virtue.)

The moral is: when applying for a job, check the country's value system before you write your resume. To be on the safe side, remember: умеренность во всём (moderation in everything).

But have that one slice of cake.

Michele A. Berdy is a Moscow-based translator and interpreter, author of "The Russian Word's Worth," a collection of her columns.

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