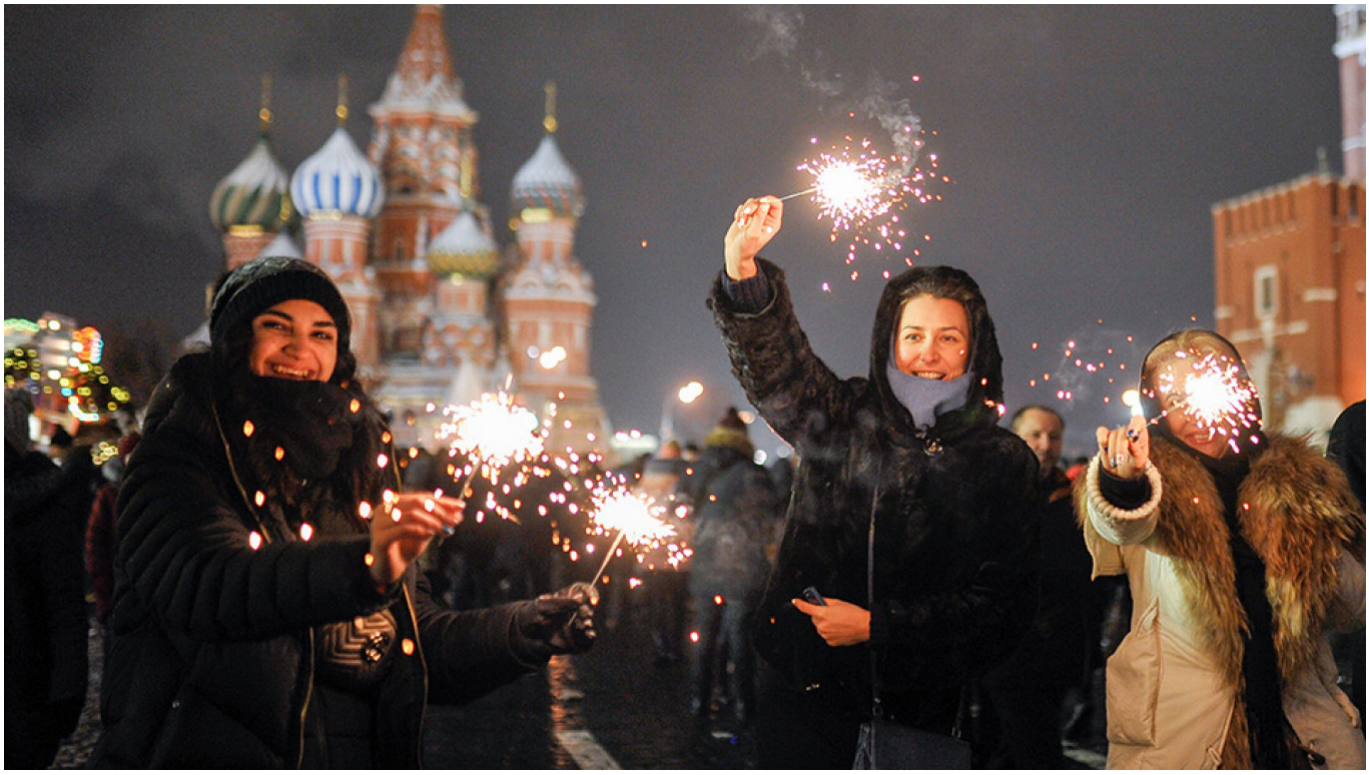
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Merry Happy Holiday to You

The Word's Worth

Michele A. Berdy's The Word's Worth

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Alexander Avilov / Moskva News Agency

Embed:

Праздник: holiday, festivity, joyous occasion

We have now entered that magical time of the year, when the countdown to the shortest day of the year with 17 hours of darkness is paired with the countdown to the merriest time of the year with the bright lights of parties, dinners, galas, after-work drinks and at-home gatherings doing their best to offset the darkness. You never stop eating, drinking and exchanging gifts for an entire month.

And then you wake in mid-January with a huge credit card debt and pants that are too tight.

Good times.

Since Russian doesn't really have a word for fun, they call all this праздник (holiday, festivity, celebration). The English word "holiday" and the Russian word "праздник" are like two words in a Venn diagram. Each has several meanings, and only some of them share the sliver of overlapping circles.

In Russian праздник is a day commemorating something good, from a birthday to the end of a war. День Победы является одним из самых значимых праздников в России (One of the most significant holidays in Russia is Victory Day.)

Праздник is also a feast day or other religious holiday. Церковные праздники — это важные для христиан даты, к которым принято готовиться молитвенно, соблюдать пост, а потом приходить на торжественную литургию с причастием в храм (A religious holiday is an important date for Christians. They prepare for it with prayers, fast and then attend the liturgy and take communion in the church.)

But праздник can really be any kind of holiday, festivity or commemorative event. In English, we tend to call these events by a variety of names. For example, in Russia they celebrate праздник весны (Festival of Spring); праздник урожая (Harvest Fest); and праздник молодых мам (Young Mother's Day), not to mention all those профессиональные праздники (professional holidays) like день переводчиков (Translator's Day) and день работников нефтяной и газовой промышленности (Day of Workers in the Oil and Gas Industry). When folks would say В Советском Союзе каждый день — праздник! (In the Soviet Union every day is a holiday!), they might have meant that every day did, in fact, honor workers in some industry. Or they might have just been being snarky.

And here's a subtle distinction for you: although праздник is not a vacation in the sense of taking a holiday to Spain for two weeks, it can refer to official non-working days. So right now if you're asked Куда едешь на праздники?, the inquirer doesn't mean "what are you planning to do on Christmas and New Year's?", but rather: Where are you going for that long stretch of days off from Dec. 31 until Jan. 9? На все праздники мы едем на дачу. (We're going to the dacha for all the state holidays.) По праздникам банки не работают (The banks are closed on official days off.)

And finally, праздник is any time someone experiences great pleasure. О! Ты купил моё любимое мороженое! Какой праздник! (Oh you bought my favorite ice cream! What a wonderful surprise!) Мой сын убрал свою комнату, даже постельное бельё постирал. Праздник какой! (My son cleaned his room and even washed his sheets. Break out the champagne!) Сегодня я решила устроить себе праздник: лежать на диване и читать детектив (I decided to give myself a treat today: lie on the couch and read murder mysteries.)

You can also call this праздник души, something that warms your heart or is lots of fun: Мы поехали на речку, купались, загорали, болтали — настоящий праздник души! (We went to the river, swam, lay in the sun and talked. We had a field day!)

There are also a few very useful festive expressions and anti-festive expressions. If you are going through a difficult time when it seems like everyone you know is in clover, someone will try to buck you up with this: Будет и на твоей улице праздник! This is literally, "there will

be festivities on your street, too" but more colloquially: Your day will come! It's a good thing to say when someone is down in the dumps and having a hard time. Жизнь-то у тебя не сегодня кончается, будет и на твоей улице праздник. За нас держись, мы не чужие. Переживем как-нибудь. (Your life isn't over today. Your ship will come in! Hold on to us, we're family. We'll get through this somehow.)

In this dark state of mind, you might also чувствовать себя чужим на празднике жизни (literally "feel like an outsider at the party of life"). This can be a bit overly dramatic, or it can describe someone feeling that they've been left behind. Все друзья моего сына уже поженились и начинают обустраиваться. Он ощущает себя чужим на празднике жизни (All my son's friends have already gotten married and are getting settled. He feels like he's been left by the wayside.)

When you want to have some fun but family or work or household duties or chores or some other life maintenance nonsense prevents it, your significant other may mollify you with Праздник бывает не каждый день! (Sunday only comes once a week.) Do you best not to shout. It's true, you know.

Another sad thing is when you actually are having fun and then someone or something comes along to spoil it all. Сегодня с утра выпал снежок. Обедали по-праздничному, хотя наша городская администрация умудрилась испортить праздник, выключив с 11 часов утра электричество (This morning we got some snow. We had a festive lunch although our city administration managed to wreck it all by turning off the electricity at 11 a.m.)

And finally, a bit of excellent snark. Say you've come home, exhausted, after having to stay at work in the evening. You are tired, starving, and in a foul mood. You walk in the door to find the kids making a mess in the living room, a pile of dishes in the sink, and your significant other snoozing on the couch. You growl: В честь какого праздника? (What the heck is going on? Whose birthday is it?!)

Cue significant other to hop up and announce: С тобой каждый день праздник! (With you every day is a holiday!)

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