**Presents in Russia and America**

Presents in Russia are generally a thing intended to be shrouded in mystery and surprise. In America, it is not uncommon to simply request what you want from family or friends and to receive it without ceremony. This is unthinkable in our tradition. It is a vital element of the present that it is picked out by the person giving it, that it is sincere and comes from the heart. It is also important to be surprised; advance knowledge of your present defeats the entire purpose. Presents are generally things of quality but modest in quantity; it would be considered extremely poor form to have a "wish list" or a "Christmas list" or something so pretentious. Likewise, giving money would be regarded as very blunt, offensive and unrefined. Simply giving someone the means to buy themselves a present is contrary to the entire purpose.

This is not to say that the giver of the present should ignore the apparent wishes of the receiver and get him something totally random. On the contrary, the point is to get someone you love what they want. If you are a parent, perhaps you overheard your son or daughter talking once about something they wish they had. You should keep this in mind for a present. The point is for this to happen by implied understanding, and not by explicit request. It should be a surprise, and should be given based on an earnest desire to please.

It is also a matter of principle that presents retain a fog of mystery. That is to say, it is inappropriate to inquire as to when, where and how your present was obtained, before or after receiving it. It is also forbidden to ask about the price; if by chance there is a price sticker that the giver neglected to remove, you should throw it away promptly and act as though you never saw it. These things simply don't matter. In fact, not only is it a matter of ethics, but seeking information about presents is regarded by many superstitious people as inviting bad luck. The less you know, the better and the more magical it is.