

A Russian All-Righty

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Лад: harmony, way, key, manner, style

Лад is a nice little word. No one seems to know its origins, but etymologists have found an early usage of the word in the south that meant a parents' blessing to a bride and groom. Now the word contains notions of order, harmony, and accord — what good parents wish for their children.

In Russian today, лад has a range of meanings, all more or less connected with harmony, literal or figurative. In music, лад means a key, as in минорный и мажорный лад (minor and major key), or a fret — those bars on the fingerboard of a guitar that helps a musician hit the right note. And if you are ever a guest at a village wedding in Russia, it may be useful to know that the keys of an accordion are also called лады.

When you do something in harmony or in rhythm with something, you do it

в лад: Аркаша

в лад своим шагам, сам себя убаюкивая, сонно и слабенько подпевал (In rhythm with his steps and crooning a lullaby to himself, Arkasha sleepily and weakly sang along.) With all this musical harmony, you won't be surprised by the expression

запеть на другой

лад, recognizable as the Russian version of changing your tune.

Пришлось ему

запеть совсем на

новый лад и

положить конец своей плохой затее (He had to change his tune and put an end to his bad scheme.)

The figurative harmony of

лад has to do with getting along well with people or things. Дома

он

бывал часто, поскольку с

матерью моей был

в ладах (He visited us often since he and my mother were on good terms.) Of course,

sometimes the relationship is not harmonious: Он был

не в ладах с законом (He had run afoul of the law.) С самим собой он не

всегда в ладах (He isn't always at peace with himself.)

When things are heading in the right direction, you say they

идут на

лад. Сначала ему

было несколько трудно привыкнуть к таким условиям работы, но потом всё пошло на

лад (At first it was somewhat difficult for him to get used to such work conditions, but then

things started looking up.)

Лад also means the way something is done, a style or system. This kind of

лад is an in-

depth, systematic version of harmony.

Он всё переделает на свой лад (He's going to redo

everything the way he likes it.) Говорят, что фильм — подобие "Крестного отца", только

на русский лад (They say that the film is like "The Godfather," only the Russian version.)

And it can be an emotional key or mode:

Надо настроить его

на весёлый лад (We need to cheer him up, literally tune him to a cheerful key.)

Лад has a lexical relative, the commonly used adverb

ладно (all right). This is the word you

use to show agreement: «Встретимся перед театром в шесть?» «Ладно. Пока.» («So we'll

meet in front of the theater at six?» "It's a deal. See you.") But in that weird way of Russian,

add "yes" and a skeptical, dismissive tone to get the opposite meaning:

Да ладно! (No way!)

Or say Ну и ладно! to convey something in the middle: Oh well, I guess that will do.

Finally, it's the word that indicates the end of a conversation:

Ну ладно, давай!

(Okay, then, bye!)

Or it can also express exasperation with лад: Ладно, кончай! (Cut it out already!)

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