

Get Ready for Seasons Greetings

Master some big words for fine human qualities.

[Michele A. Berdy's The Word's Worth](#)

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Alexander Avilov / Moskva News Agency

Щедрая душа: a generous soul

It's that time of the year again: holidays, parties, merrymaking followed by more holidays, parties and merrymaking. If all goes well and we are lucky, we spend time with hospitable, good-natured, well-meaning folks. Naturally, this got me thinking about how to express this in Russian. The fun part is that Russian words for many of these good qualities are formed by combining two words that you already know. The not-so-fun part is that it isn't always easy to figure out the meaning of the big word formed by two little words.

Take хлебосольный. Easy, right? Хлеб is bread, соль is salt, so хлебосольный человек is a bread-and-salt person, er, a person who is solid and feisty? Someone nurturing and spicy? Actually, хлебосольный хозяин — sometimes called simply хлебосол — is a hospitable host, one who offers visitors and guests a loaf of bread and a dish of salt — figuratively or

literally. According to one source, хлеб олицетворяет богатство и благополучие, а соль защищает от враждебных сил и чар (the bread is the symbol of wealth and comfort, while the salt protects from enemy forces and spells). Over time this proffering of bread and salt became the definition of a generous host. Он приехал обедать к дальнему родственнику, и тот оказался хлебосолом и гастрономом (He went to have lunch with a distant relative, who turned out to be a very hospitable host and a gourmand). Places can be hospitable, too: Это был хлебосольный дом, и, когда меня приглашали, появлялась возможность посидеть в сытном тепле (It was a welcoming home, and when I was invited, it was a chance to sit for a while, well-fed and warm).

Another word for a hospitable host is the compound adjective гостеприимный, from гость (guest) and принимать (to take in, welcome, receive). It is, like хлебосольный, usually translated as hospitable, but it might also be welcoming: Нельзя не отметить голландскую гостеприимность (Everyone is struck by how welcoming Dutch people are). Семья была дружная и гостеприимная (The family was friendly and hospitable).

Another excellent quality in a host is благожелательность – when someone желает (wishes) another person благо (a blessing, good fortune). This is about the same as доброжелательность — желать (to wish) добро (good things). Both are defined as способность испытывать желание, чтобы другому было хорошо (the ability of wishing another person well). Lovely, isn't it?

It can mean benevolence, sympathy, compassion, friendliness, or good will. It's nice to hear someone say, Имейте в виду, если вам будет нужна помощь, у вас искренний благожелатель (Know that if you need help, you have someone who truly wishes you well). It's a great quality in a hotel owner: Нас сразу встретил доброжелательный хозяин гостиницы (We were greeted by the friendly hotel owner right away). In politics it can be positive or negative benevolence, depending on your point of view: Это означало благожелательный нейтралитет, поскольку болгарское правительство стремилось ограничить зависимость своей страны от российских энергоносителей (This meant benevolent neutrality, since the Bulgarian government wanted to limit the country's energy dependence on Russia).

My favorite of the compound good qualities is великодушие (noun) and великодушный (adjective) — having a great or big (великая) soul (душа). As is usually the case, the Russian-language soul is the English-language heart. Ты такой добрый, великодушный человек (You are such a good, big-hearted person). It can also express a kind of generosity of spirit: Его великодушие проявилось в прощении человеческих ошибок (He magnanimously forgave human errors). This is a quality that we should all strive for: Проявите великодушие к тем, кто заблуждается (Be merciful to those who stray).

An interesting word is радушие (noun) or радушный (adjective), which means cordiality or hospitality. The words are a mix of рад (happy) and душа (soul) and they describe a soul — or heart — filled with joy. It is a very nice quality indeed, especially in a place: Кавказское радушие лучше любого психотерапевта излечивает душевные раны (The warm welcome in the Caucasus heals emotional wounds better than any therapist). Or in a host: Спасибо за радушный приём и гостеприимство (Thank you for the warm-hearted welcome and your hospitality).

In приветливость (noun) and приветливый (adjective) the root привет (Hi! Hello! Greetings!) conveys the sense of affability, being open and forthcoming. This is an excellent attitude in a boss or editor: Прихожу, готовый услышать самое скверное, но редактор встречает меня приветливой улыбкой (When I get there, I'm expecting to hear the worst take-down, but instead the editor greets me with a warm smile). It is also, in one person's view, a useful quality in women: Она вообще была приветливая, но её приветливость держала мужиков на расстоянии — есть такое умение у умных женщин (In general she was very friendly, but it was the kind of friendliness that keeps men at bay — smart women have that ability).

All of the above qualities are united by one thing: щедрость (generosity), a prized characteristic, be it emotional or physical. Мой отец — благородный и щедрый человек (My father is a noble and generous man). Щедрость can be found in an action: Это очень щедрый жест! (That's very generous of you, literally "that's a very generous gesture"). It can be nature's generosity: Фестиваль в конце сентября празднует щедрость урожая (The festival in late September celebrates the bounty of the harvest). Or it can be a spiritual quality that is very sweet — in fact, so sweet that it's part of a brand name for chocolate: щедрая душа (a generous spirit, literally "soul").

And of course, it's one of the core values of the season, what you'd like to see in everyone you meet: Ваша щедрость соответствует духу праздника (Your generosity is in keeping with the spirit of the holiday).

Мечтать не вредно... (You can always dream...)

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