

Gotta Love All of That Russian Goodness

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Хороша собой: pretty woman; a looker

We're heading into the Russian luv season.

First, it's День всех влюблённых (Valentine's Day), that un-Russian, unpatriotic holiday that no one should celebrate but everyone does. Then it's Men's Day, aka День защитника Отечества (Defender of the Homeland Day), followed by Международный женский день (International Women's Day). They jack up the flower prices so high you need an advance on your paycheck to buy a bouquet of daisies.

For me, the season means coming up with хорошие слова (nice things to say) when I meet my neighbor on the landing. Wait, should that be добрые слова (nice things to say)?

What exactly is the difference between хороший and добрый? Like so much in the Russian

language, in some contexts the distinction between хороший (good) and добрый (good) is clear, while in others it's a bit fuzzy.

You generally use the word хороший to describe something you like that possesses good qualities, from хороший товар (well-made product) to хорошая погода (fine weather). It can describe something that is smart or sensible, like хороший подход (reasonable approach) or хорошая мысль (brilliant idea). Сегодня её день рождения — хороший повод встретиться (Today is her birthday, a good excuse to get together).

Хороший is also used to describe what might be called the right sort of people and their behavior: хорошее общество (good society), хороший тон (good taste) and хорошие манеры (good manners). Хороший can also describe something that is good-sized. It's good because there's a lot of it: Он зарабатывает хорошие деньги (He makes a good salary).

The short form of the adjective — хорош, хороша, хороши — has a different meaning: good-looking. Как он хорош! (He's a real dish!) You can add the word собой for a bit of emphasis: До чего она хороша собой! (Wow, is she a looker!)

Today the word добрый is mostly used to describe human qualities: tender, caring, kind, warm-hearted, generous. Он просто очень добрый человек (He's simply a very kind man).

When used in reference to opinions or words, добрый means positive or admiring: Он доброго мнения о тебе (He has a very high opinion of you). Добрый совет is good advice — useful, to the point. Старая, добрая традиция is a good, old tradition — wise, sensible.

Sometimes добрый is used in a folksy, old-fashioned sense to mean something of good quality: Она сварила добрый борщ (She made a good pot of borscht).

In some contexts, добрый and хороший are almost the same. As far as I can tell, the only difference between доброе здоровье and хорошее здоровье (good health) is stylistic.

But with people, the distinction between хороший and добрый is subtle but significant. Someone can be хороший человек (a good person) but not добрый человек (a kind person). Take, for example, someone who doesn't break the law, doesn't raise his voice or hand in anger and fulfills all his social and personal obligations but is rather niggardly, sharp-tongued and hard-hearted. This is the honest worker and family man who is a pain in the butt to live with. And someone can be добрый — generous, warm, kind — but not хороший — irresponsible, unreliable, dishonest. This is the thief with a heart of gold.

In the luv season, as you lose your head under the influence of the first harbingers of spring and the constant sales pitch of advertisers, take a look at your main squeeze and think: Какая она добрая, хорошая и как хороша! (She sure is kind, good and so good-looking!)

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