

You Gotta Have Heart

The Word's Worth

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

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От всего сердца: From the bottom of my heart

It's the end of a busy week, and that means: Time for a pop quiz! Put your notebooks on the floor, turn off your phones — that means you in the back where you think I can't see you — and take out a clean sheet of paper and pen. No, not a pencil. I'm talking to you in front in the red shirt. I want to see nice, clean ink letters.

Ready?

First question: Below is a list of meanings of the word сердце (heart). Which one does not belong?

1. A muscle in the chest that pumps blood.
2. An important place that has great meaning

for a group of people. 3. A person who is the spirit of a group of people. 4. Anger. 5. Love. 6. Center of feeling. 7. A person's emotional composition. 8. A romantic partner. 9. Slang for car.

And the answer is...oh, surely you got it?

It's #9, of course, although I suppose somewhere out there there's a guy in greasy overalls buffing the hood of his 1957 Moskvich 410 and crooning Сердце моё! (My love!). But it's not slang.

How many thought it was #4, anger? Come on, be honest! Don't worry – it's nothing to be ashamed of. Unless you read a lot of 18th and 19th century Russian literature in the original, you probably have not come across this usage, for example, from Turgenev: Жуковский за это сердится: но я не со страхом, а с улыбкой встречаю его сердце (Zhukovsky gets angry at that, but I greet his anger with a smile, not with fear).

Today you are likely to catch this meaning in the phrase в сердцах (in a fit of anger). В сердцах муж хлопнул дверью и ушёл (Furious, my husband walked out and slammed the door.) You may also hear it in the phrase держать сердце (to hold a grudge): Прости меня, пожалуйста! Не держи на меня сердца! (Please forgive me! Don't hold it against me!)

Apparently, once upon a time in ancient Rus folks believed that the heart was the holder of big emotions — both love and passion as well as anger and ill temper. In fact, сердце (heart) and сердить/сердиться (to anger someone/to be angry) are related, which just goes to show — actually, I have no idea what it goes to show other than the ancients had a pretty good sense that people were, at their core, both good and bad.

For native English speakers, the meanings and usages of the word сердце are, for once, mostly similar to English meanings of the word heart. But there are some slight differences and a slew of expressions that should be in everyone's personal lexicon. After all, you never know when you might have to, or want to, speak from the heart (от всего сердца).

In Russian, the heart is the organ where a person's emotions, mood, intuition and even common sense abide. When you are dithering over a decision, some wise person — or annoyingly, your Significant Other — will say: Пусть сердце тебе подскажет (Listen to your heart.) The problem is your heart (well, my heart) is likely to say: Завтра решим. Давай выпьем! (We'll decide tomorrow. Let's have a drink!).

The heart represents the kind of person you are. Your heart might be good: золотое (gold), доброе (kind); большое (big) or bad: каменное (made of stone); мстительное (vengeful); холодное (cold). Actually, sometimes it's really simple. Good: Он человек с сердцем. (He's got a heart). Bad: У него нет сердца (He's heartless).

Of course, сердце is where love lives — or dies or does a lot of to-ing and fro-ing. Он женат, но она его любит. Ну, что ж. Сердцу не прикажешь (He's married, but she loves him. Well, what can you do? The heart has reasons that reason doesn't understand, literally “you can't order your heart”). Он развёлся, и с тех пор сердце его разбито (He got divorced and his heart is still broken). Он покори́л её сердце (He won her heart.) Она отдала ему свое сердце (She gave him her heart.) Другой предложил ей руку и сердце, но у неё не лежит сердце к

нему (Another man asked for her hand in marriage, but she doesn't have feelings for him, literally "her heart doesn't lie towards him.")

Сердце also a place outside the body, or rather inside the body of a country, state, city or any other geographical expanse: Вот какая хорошая у нас столица: Третий Рим, порт пяти морей и сердце Родины город Москва (Look at how great our capital is: the city of Moscow is the Third Rome, port of five seas, and the heart of our Homeland).

I don't think that speaker is taking Moscow seriously enough.

But: Мы не принимаем его слова близко к сердцу (We won't take his words to heart.) That said, Слышу такие слова, и сердце обливается кровью (I hear those words and my heart bleeds.)

You get the idea. In addition to bleeding, the heart can perform other acts. When someone is afraid, сердце закатывается (my heart skips a beat) or сердце замирает (my heart stands still). When you get bad news, сердце упало (my heart sank). And when the bad news turns out to be a false alarm, сердце отошло (my heart started beating again, calmed down).

Similarly, you can describe how you did something by the nature of your heart. Я пошла на встречу со своим молодым человеком с лёгким сердцем (I headed off to meet my boyfriend with a light heart.) Я закончила работу и поехала на дачу с чистым сердцем (I finished work and went off to my dacha with a clean conscience, literally a "pure heart"). Я пошёл на похороны с тяжёлым сердцем (I went to the funeral with a heavy heart). Я шёл на встречу с профессором с упавшим сердцем (I went to meet my professor with a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach).

There is one other useful phrase, although I cannot, for the life of me, completely figure out the image. Скрепя сердце means to do something reluctantly, unwillingly, or with gritted teeth. Скрепить is to bolt or fasten something, and one dictionary states that the phrase is from a secondary meaning of the verb скрепиться (to restrain oneself, to curb one's anger, to fight down one's fear). I guess the image is of holding your heart in check, not doing what you want to do.

Sometimes this is a big deal. Николай II скрепя сердце разрешил «стольпинскую» реформу (Nicholas II grudgingly agreed to the Stolypin reform).

But sometimes it isn't: Скрепя сердце они согласились выжить без хулахупа (With great reluctance they agreed to live without a hula hoop.)

The decision was tough because, as we know: сердцу не прикажешь (the heart has a will of its own).

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