

Reconsidering Giving Up Seats



Shirley Loo: Reconsidering giving up seats

I've always known that giving up one's seat is a virtue.

But at this age, when I see people entering the subway car, most are looking at their phones. If I am fortunate enough to have a seat, would I give it up? To be honest, if I see someone younger than me, I would continue to sit comfortably. However, if I see an elderly person, with a mask, white hair, and unsteady steps, of course, I would give up my seat immediately.

The big prerequisite for giving up a seat, though, is that our eyes can't be glued to our phones. Otherwise, we'll miss these 'opportunities' right in front of us, right?

As for being offered a seat, I have never had that experience so far. Probably because I dye my hair and move about freely, although I am close to being elderly, I still appear to be in the 'no need to give up a seat' category.

A friend asked me, if someone really stood up to offer me their seat, would I sit down? Honestly, no. Unless my hands are full and I'm extremely tired, I still feel that 'if you can stand, stand.' This is probably the dignity and persistence of a middle-aged woman.

This is your mother's reflection on the issue of giving up one's seat. Because I am in such an awkward position between 'to offer or not to offer' and 'to sit or not to sit.'

Until you were pregnant and I called to ask how your subway commute to work was going every day. You always said, 'No one gives up their seat' (especially on the Kowloon line). Those men in suits always keep their heads down, looking at their phones, indifferent to those around them, even as your belly gets bigger and bigger, the number of people giving up their seats is pitifully small, if any at all.

Facing such an indifferent city where only phones are seen and not neighbors, my heart is not at ease. So I can only pray for your safety every day, hoping that someone will be kind enough to let you 'sit comfortably' for a while. Secondly, it also makes me deeply reflect on the topic of parent-child education, on how to encourage parents to teach their children the virtue of giving up seats (since many parents nowadays tend to 'hog seats' for their young and strong children).

This profound lesson will probably also make you understand what to do when you see a pregnant woman in the future!



Ho Ying : The virtue of giving up one's seat

Since I was young, I knew that we should give up our seats to those in need. Since 2009, "priority seats" have appeared on various modes of transportation in Hong Kong, and I thought this tradition would continue. When I first found out I was pregnant, I also said to a friend who was about to give birth, "On the subway, people should give up their seats for you, right?" Her response surprised me: "How could that be? From the time I got pregnant until now, I take the subway to and from work every day, and the number of times someone has given up their seat for me can be counted on one hand." Besides her, many friends have shared their experiences with me, telling me not to expect anyone to give up their seat.

How could this be? Isn't giving up seats something we've learned since childhood? At first, I didn't quite believe it. But over the past few months, as my belly has grown day by day, I thought there would be more and more chances for people to give up their seats. Unexpectedly, I still had to fight for a seat myself. Every time I enter the carriage, what I see is rows of "heads-down tribe," either looking at their phones or fast asleep. Occasionally someone would look up to see which station we had arrived at, but even if

they saw someone in need, they would quickly turn their heads back to their phones, pretending not to see.

Friends always ask, "Did you go to the priority seat? Those people should be more likely to give up their seats, right?" From my experience, most people sitting in priority seats think they have a need to sit down and won't think of giving up their seats. Passengers sitting in other seats always feel that there are priority seats to take care of those in need, so they don't think of giving up their seats either.

Some friends suggested, "Then you should wear tighter clothes and touch your belly so that others can see it!" I've tried this too, but people just look at me with puzzled eyes and then look down at their phones.

Gradually, I've found that the people who usually give up their seats are mothers with children, as they have also gone through the stage of pregnancy. If I enter a carriage filled with working men one day, the chances of someone giving up their seat greatly decrease.

If we want to change the ethos of the entire city, we can only teach this virtue to our children by setting an example, so that love and warmth can reappear in the next generation.