



Northeastern University

It's said that you can't make old friends, and my friendship with Hagit Borer is of a very respectable vintage. But even when we were both recent arrivals in the United States and the linguistics department at MIT, I discovered that Hagit's talent for creating a rapport was altogether special. It doesn't matter if you bonded with her over hours of erudite discourse on syntax or if you just met her in passing at a rally for human rights. Hagit always empathizes, always understands, and always cares. She can make anyone feel like an old friend.

This may be surprising to her many admirers around the world who only know her from afar, as a writer and thinker of unflinching principle. Strangers may assume she is forged from rectitude and steel. Yet Hagit is the essence of kindness. I experienced this in the nascency of our careers when we collaborated on the grammar of Semitic languages. The brilliance of her ideas was only outshone by the expansive generosity of her spirit – both qualities have only burgeoned with the passage of time. Long after we parted ways in Cambridge, our lives converged again in Los Angeles, and I found that her home was invariably open to students, faculty, and old friends. For such a daunting intellect, she is remarkably hospitable.

Perhaps the key to understanding Hagit's exceptional scholarly career and her political advocacy is the same. Whether in linguistics, in politics, or in society at large, she is always asking, "Why must this be so?" The status quo does not merit assent. There is too much that should be rectified, too vast a scope for improvement in our knowledge, our honesty, and our morals. To demand less would be a failure of our ideas and generosity. If we are to be our best selves, like Hagit, we should always empathize, understand, and care.

We should behave like old friends.

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