

Quote Him Exactly

A sentence from May 2025 came back on Sunday 25 October 2026, changed on the way. Why the exact words matter, especially two days before a vote.

Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren · Jerusalem · Monday 26 October 2026 · 15 Cheshvan 5787

On Tuesday 20 May 2025, in an interview on Kan Reshet Bet, Yair Golan said a sentence that many Israelis, me among them, found deeply wrong. The Times of Israel translated it this way:

"A sane country does not fight against civilians, does not kill babies as a hobby, and does not give itself the aim of expelling populations."

The reaction crossed party lines, with criticism from both coalition and opposition. Opposition Leader Yair Lapid called the claim "a gift to our enemies." That evening Golan gave a statement. He did not take the sentence back, and he said:

"I was referring solely to the most failed government in Israel's history — not to the IDF."

You may accept that clarification or reject it. I think the original sentence should never have been said about a country whose soldiers were fighting Hamas. Either way, the record has two parts, and both are on the record: the words, and what he said he meant.

What happened on Sunday 25 October 2026

In a Channel 14 broadcast on Sunday 25 October 2026, the 2025 sentence was retold as an accusation aimed at IDF soldiers themselves. A panelist on the same broadcast objected on air that Golan had been speaking about the government. This reading was not new. It circulated widely in May 2025 as well. Repeating it seventeen months later, two days before a vote, does not make it closer to what he said.

I am not going to repeat the retold version here. It is not what he said, and repeating it would only carry it further.

Two different wrongs

The Rambam draws a line that fits this case almost exactly (Hilchot De'ot 7:2). Speaking negatively about a person, even when it is true, is lashon hara. Saying something false about him is a different sin with its own name: motzi shem ra.

Golan's 2025 sentence was harsh speech about his own country's government, in wartime, and it hurt many soldiers and their families. That is a fair subject for criticism. A retelling that moves his words onto the soldiers is a second, separate problem. It adds something he did not say to something he did. The two wrongs add up.

The Chafetz Chaim's conditions for speaking negatively about someone for a real purpose (Hilchot Lashon Hara, Klal 10:2) include knowing the facts yourself rather than from hearsay, and not making the wrong bigger than it is. A paraphrase that grows on every retelling fails the second test even when the first sentence was bad.

Why this matters this week

Israel votes on Tuesday 27 October 2026. In the final days of any campaign, quotes become ammunition, and every camp is tempted. I have seen it done to people I agree with and to people I don't.

So here is the rule I am trying to keep, and I'd ask you to keep it with me:

- Quote the words, with the date and the place they were said.
- If the speaker clarified, quote that too.
- If you want to criticise, criticise what was actually said. There is usually enough there.
- If you passed on a wrong version, correct it in the same place you posted it.

Truth spoken carefully is stronger than an exaggeration. It is also the only kind of argument that survives the next morning.

Sources

- The Times of Israel, "Golan defends 'killing babies' comment, says it was directed at failed government," 20 May 2025.
- Associated Press, report on Golan's remarks, 20 May 2025; The Jerusalem Post, 20 May 2025; Ynet, Golan's evening statement, 20 May 2025 (Hebrew original of both quotes).
- Channel 14 broadcast, Sunday 25 October 2026 (transcript reviewed for this piece).
- Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot De'ot 7:2; Chafetz Chaim, Hilchot Lashon Hara, Klal 10:2 (Sefaria).

All glory to the Ribono shel Olam · Errors are mine.

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