The Leadership of Rabbi Obadia Yosef z”l

Uniting the Israeli Sephardic Jews around one set of traditions, customs and rulings was one of the main goals and achievements of Rabbi Obadia Yosef z”l. As we have explained, Sephardic Jews were coming to Israel from many different countries and brought with them their local customs. In many (most?) cases those practices were stricter than what Jewish Law requires. Pesah is a good example. I remember that Jews from Spanish Morocco used to cover the dining room table with seven covers and tablecloths. Or that no one would dare to buy normal sugar or common oil for Pesah. And they would even look to buy a Kosher for Pesah shampoo, etc, etc. The first book published by rabbi Obadia Yosef was Hazon Obadia, a book about the Laws of Pesah. When first published in the 50’s it was a revolutionary book.
Because Rabbi Yosef went back to the plain Halakha, without the extra stringencies coming, among others sources, from mystical views (for example, Ben Ish Hay, etc. For Rabbi Obadia Yosef the rulings of the Ari haQadosh or other meqqubalim are applicable only for Tefila, or as a private practice) or from Ashkenazi rulings (particularly in the Laws of Pesah Sephardim and Ashkenazim hold very different views. See for example **this**). For this he was criticized and by many Rabbis rejected as a valid Halakhic authority.
A very similar process happened with the laws of Nidda (family purity), the Laws of Shabbat, Kashrut in the kitchen, just to mention some popular examples. In the 60’s and 70’s his opinions were considered by many as very liberal. It took decades until his voice became the authorized voice of mainstream Sephardic communities.
His vision was to facilitate the practice of Judaism, something that he saw as a very needed principle for our modern days. A few weeks before he passed away he instructed his son, Rabbi Ytshaq Yosef, the newly elected Rishon LeTsion (Sephardic Chief rabbi of Israel) that as the new highest rabbinic authority he must always try to find the ways to make the practice of Tora as lenient and as accessible as possible.
Tomorrow, BH, we will continue with this last subject.

Rabbi Obadia Yosef crying for the destruction of the Bet-haMiqdash