Rabbi Obadia Yosef and the power of Halakhic leniency

As we explained yesterday, one of the principles that guided the rulings of rabbi Obadia Yosef is that a Rabbi must do all possible efforts to make the practice of Judaism more accessible and simpler for his community. Therefore whenever Rabbi Yosef was able to find a way (not a loophole!) he would rule with leniency. This principle is known as *koha dehetera 'adif*, "the power of being lenient is preferable". This does not means just that it is recommendable for a Rabbi to be lenient, but also that a Rabbi that is lenient is preferred over other Rabbis. Just like it happens with doctors,etc. the more a Rabbi knows, the more lenient he can be. Whereas when a Rabbi does not know the whole spectrum of the law, his limitations will bring him to be stricter.

Rabbi Obadia Yosef viewed ruling in a lenient way as a characteristic of Sephardic posqim. He quoted the Hida who explained the "Halakhic character" of Sephardic legislators. "The Sephardim are seized by a measure of piety (*hesed*) and therefore are lenient in the Halakha…".
There were cases of family law, delicate cases like *mamzerut*, in which Rabbi Yosef was *the only Rabbi* among all the Rabbis of his generation, who was able to find a way to free a family from this anguish.
Another example: after the Yom Kippur war in 1973, many soldiers were missing in action. According to Jewish Law if the body, or a witness that saw the dead body, cannot found then the wife cannot be considered a widow and therefore she can't remarry ('aguna). In Oct. 7th the New York Times wrote an article on Rabbi Yosef and it referred to this case: "In another unconventional ruling, the Rabbi allowed hundreds of women whose husbands were missing after the 1973 war to remarry, although, traditionally, remarriage is allowed only after … there is incontrovertible proof that her former husband has died."
Rabbi Yosef considered that it was a great achievement finding sufficient Halakhic backup or reasoning to prove that a lenient position is correct.

Israel's Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu,
expressing his condolences for the
passing of Rabbi Obadia Yosef z"l