I spent Simchat Torah in Yerushalayim’s Hadassah Hospital,” Devori Borstein wrote to me, “visiting a family member who was being treated there. In the hospital’s shul, about 100 people gathered to daven. I don’t think there is any shul like this in the world, with Jews of all stripes: Ashkenazim and Sephardim, National Religious and Satmar, Litvaks and Masoratiim, and Belzer, Gur and Chabad chassidim. Nobody’s first choice was to be in the hospital for Yom Tov, except for Rabbi Yitzchak and Sima Peretz, a couple who have volunteered to provide meals for the sick and their visitors at the hospital for 25 years. Some people were there for happy reasons such as a birth, and others were there for more challenging reasons. There were sick children, men with artificial payot attached to their kippot, and individuals in wheelchairs connected to IVs in shul.

“As Yom Tov began, Rabbi Peretz got up to speak. ‘Anyone who is here now surely thinks that Hashem doesn’t want them to be happy this Simchat Torah. However, the joy of Simchat Torah is not dependent on our situation or location. If anything, the joy of celebrating with the Torah can be a tremendous zechut and can help one experience salvation in supernatural ways.’

“There is no way to describe how incredible the hakafot were. The Gemara writes that the Shechina is found above the head of a sick person (Shabbat 12b), and one had a palpable feeling of the Shechina being in that shul. People with tremendous physical and mental pain danced with the Torah with unbelievable passion – some with smiles and some with tears. There wasn’t a heart that remained unmoved from such an incredible display of emunah.”

May we be able to experience such joy on Yom Tov, in less challenging circumstances.

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