



Where is the Farbrengen?

'Darkei HaChassidim', the ways of Chassidim, are one of the unique novelties that give a special flavor to the fulfillment of the Mitzvos. In this story we see a group of Chassidim keeping the custom of having a Farbrengen before Hakafos under dire circumstances.

Rabbi Shmuel Prus of Kfar Chabad related the following story: I cannot forget the Yomim Tovim of Tishrei when I was still in Russia and Europe, whether it was when I was imprisoned in Siberia or at home in Leningrad or Riga. The thing they all had in common was they were difficult times yet we made every effort to fulfill the *mitzvos* and to protect the *chassidic* way of life to the best of our abilities, many times under considerable risks.

The Simchas Torah I will tell you about was when I was in Leningrad. I'll never forget it. Every year, *Anash* put in great efforts to properly *farbreng* on Simchas Torah. They were particular about not making *Hakafos* without a *farbrengen* beforehand.

The situation in those days was tense and very dangerous, but they weren't going to forego it. Since I was new to Leningrad and my house was unfamiliar to most *chassidim*, it was decided that the *farbrengen* would take place in my house. The celebrated *mashpia*, Reb Chonye Morosov, came over to me the night of Shmini Atzeres and asked me if I had *mashkeh* at home. When I said that I had, he said, "Invite only ten people to come to the *farbrengen* in your home." Reb Chonye then added, "We will *farbreng* in your house, but you must remain in the *sukkah* of the big *shul* and ask everybody where they're *farbrenging*, so no one will suspect

that the *farbrengen* is taking place in your house!" He didn't want many people to come because of the great danger. And when Reb Chonye said something, you listened!

Naturally I was very happy to host the *farbrengen*, despite the great danger it entailed. My entire house consisted of one room of forty meters, furnished with one large table and some old wooden chairs. Yet this was of no concern; the *Farbrengen* would take place!

So I sat in the *sukka* of the *shul* and surreptitiously asked each Lubavitcher whether he knew where they were *farbrenging*. The atmosphere was such that everybody knew there was a *farbrengen* (because there was no way we'd have Simchas Torah without a *farbrengen*), but everybody was searching for the hideout. I sat in the *sukka* for two or three hours but then I couldn't take it any longer. I thought, the great *chassidim* are *farbrenging* in my house and I'm sitting here idly? I went back home and joined the *farbrengen*. Meanwhile, the *Anash* sensed that a *farbrengen* was going on somewhere, and this was because of Reb Chonye's unexplained absence. So they sent emissaries to Lubavitchers' homes throughout the city in order to find out where the *farbrengen* was taking place. When one of these emissaries came to my house and discovered the *farbrengen*, they didn't let him leave so he wouldn't pass

the information along.

Somehow, word of the *farbrengen* got out and at 12:30 at night the house was full of *chassidim*, who drank and made merry. They began singing and dancing, making such a ruckus, that the floor beneath us trembled. Under us, on the second floor, lived a gentle professor, of course, he was awakened by the noise. He came storming upstairs to yell about the racket and about the dangerously shaky floor, which could cave in at any moment, due to the unusual strain which it was taking and which it was definitely not built to handle. One of the *chassidim* gave him a cup of *mashkeh* and urged him to drink it. This was followed by another cup, and another, until he too put his hand on the *chassidim* and joined the dancing. At a certain point there was no *mashkeh* left. I took advantage of my acquaintance with the owner of a store that sold drinks near my house, and the owner gave me the keys to the store and we took another box of *mashkeh* from there. The *farbrengen* went on until six in the morning, and that's when the nighttime *Hakafos* began. We all went to the *shul*. Rather than say we walked there, it may be more accurate to say we somersaulted there. Those who *davened* in the first *minyan* were in the midst of Shacharis, so they *davened* Shacharis while the *chassidim* enthusiastically and joyously did the nighttime *Hakafos*. It was definitely a Simchas Torah to remember.