



RABBI ISAAC N. TRAININ BIKUR CHOLIM COORDINATING COUNCIL

A PROGRAM OF THE JEWISH BOARD OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES



“Good Company” Brings a Laugh to Bikur Cholim

What do doodling, a Spanish comic strip and *Dick Tracy* all have in common?

Each in its own way contributed to shaping the work of cartoonist Robert Lebowitz and sparked a collaboration with the Bikur Cholim Coordinating Council (BCCC) that has resulted in the publication of the brand new comic book, *Good Company: Facts and Fictions of Bikur Cholim*.

With gentle humor, *Good Company* addresses notions about bikur cholim (visiting the sick) that often surface at a visit. Lebowitz, who is also a student at Yeshiva University's Wurzweiler School of Social Work, has illustrated for *New York Sun* and *L Magazine* and for the last 10 years published a political comic strip in *Riverdale Review* and *Bronx Press Review*. He first began drawing cartoons at the age of seven, inspired by the *Dick Tracy* comic strip and his father's doodles on telephone messages. While Lebowitz attended Brown University for an undergraduate degree in English and art, he received his formal training in illustration by taking classes at the nearby Rhode Island School of Design.

As a bikur cholim volunteer with Ohab Zedek synagogue in Manhattan for the past five years, Lebowitz, who volunteers primarily at

Mt. Sinai Hospital, has made literally hundreds of visits, but it never occurred to him to bridge his volunteer effort with his considerable talents as a cartoonist.

It wasn't until he was working as a social work intern at the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services (JBFCS) in New York City and crossed paths with Robin Schoenfeld, LMSW, BCCC Program Director based at JBFCS, that the creative spark struck. A recent trip to Mexico had brought Schoenfeld into contact with Spanish cartoons, and although she was unable to understand the language, Schoenfeld was impressed by the power of comics to convey a message through images. Upon her return, Schoenfeld talked with colleague Vicki Rosenstreich, LCSW, BCCC Director of Training, who interestingly enough had been considering a storybook idea. Together they believed the cartoon medium could be used creatively on behalf of bikur cholim. And they knew just the person for the job. Like any true collaboration,

it was a meeting of minds that sent Robert to the drawing board. And so *Good Company* was born.

Good Company features 10 color comic strips that offer a hilarious glimpse into bikur cholim. The comic book will be available at www.bikurcholimcc.org and at the bikur cholim conference on November 9th. □

Save the Date

**“I Will Awaken The Dawn”
The Transformative Power
of Bikur Cholim**

Bikur Cholim Annual Conference
November 9, 2008 (See Page 4)

Bikur Cholim is Hebrew for visiting the sick



From the Co-Presidents



This year marked the passing of a great leader in Jewish communal service, Rabbi Isaac Trainin, for whom the Bikur Cholim Coordinating Council is named. But the vision that Rabbi Trainin held of bikur cholim as a unifying force to bring people together is carried out in new communities every day. A powerful example of this is shown in the lifesaving ways bikur cholim helped in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina to bring a community together. (See “After Katrina: Bikur Cholim Helps Communities Re-Build,” page 3.)

We are both excited about finding creative new outlets to inspire and motivate bikur cholim groups. Our Executive Committee and staff are very proud of our new comic book, *Good Company: Facts and Fictions of Bikur Cholim*. It reminds us that, despite the serious nature of our visits, humor can play a vital role in helping each of us in our bikur cholim efforts.

I welcome Chava Rose as co-President of the Council. In taking on this new role, Chava said, “The act of bikur cholim allows us to develop perspective and gain wisdom. It is a privilege for me to be able to help others to continue this rich tradition of loving-kindness, and I am delighted to participate in an organization that has, for two decades, supported my own bikur cholim efforts.”

We’re looking forward to meeting you at our 21st Annual Conference on November 9th and to learning how you have initiated and strengthened your bikur cholim efforts. Join us for a conference that will be filled with meaningful workshops, practical resources and inspiring speakers.

Chava Rose

Dr. Robert N. Wolf

Remembering Rabbi Isaac Trainin

Rabbi Isaac N. Trainin, who founded the Bikur Cholim Coordinating Council in 1986, died on January 8th at the age of 88. Below are reflections from his daughter, Barbara Trainin Blank on Rabbi Trainin’s vision of bikur cholim.

As long as I can remember, bikur cholim was an important part of my father’s work, pre-dating the establishment of the Coordinating Council. While I cannot recall any particular person or experience that motivated his commitment, I do remember a *midrash* he often quoted in speeches and fundraising efforts that offer insight into my father’s vision and understanding of bikur cholim.

My father would tell of the first blessing of the *Shemoneh-Esrai*, a silent prayer said during daily services. He noted that the prayer opens with the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob but closes with the mention only of Abraham.

Why is that?

Because Jacob, who is shown sitting in his tents, represents a man devoted to Torah study. Isaac who is shown in quiet reflection, represents a man devoted to prayer. But Abraham, whose tent was open in all directions, represents a man devoted to acts of loving-kindness.

Bikur cholim is one of the many acts of loving-kindness, my father explained, adding that acts of loving-kindness are a unifying force that brings Jews together across all ideologies.

For my father bikur cholim was both a mitzvah, a religious commandment to be fulfilled, and a communal responsibility. Bikur cholim became one of the multiple ways in which he served the Jewish community and one of his lasting legacies. He was so proud that the Coordinating Council was named in his honor. □



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The Bikur Cholim Coordinating Council honors Rabbi Trainin’s commitment to bikur cholim and as a visionary leader who made so many contributions to the Jewish community. Dr. John Ruskey, Executive Vice President and CEO of UJA-Federation of New York, in a moving eulogy spoke of Rabbi Trainin’s incredible gift for identifying problems which became mandates for communal action. During Rabbi Trainin’s tenure as Advisor on Religious Affairs for UJA-Federation, the issues he addressed illustrate the extent to which he was ahead of his time. Among the projects he led was the founding of the following:

- Committee on Jewish Medical Ethics (1962)
- Task Force on Marriage and Divorce (1966)
- Task Force on Compulsive Gambling (1970s)
- Task Force on Alcoholism, which later included drug abuse (1970s)
- Task Force on Jewish Women (1970s)
- Task Force on Mental Health and Judaism (1977)
- Task Force on Interfaith Marriage (1980s)

This year’s Bikur Cholim Conference is dedicated in memory of Rabbi Trainin

After Katrina: Bikur Cholim Helps Communities Re-Build

When staff members Anne Freedman, Celia Vine and Kay Radlauer of the Jewish Family Service (JFS) of Greater New Orleans attended the Bikur Cholim Annual Conference in November 2006, one year following Hurricane Katrina, they arrived with a singular purpose: To learn how to help the Baton Rouge Jewish community which had more than doubled overnight with the evacuation that brought Katrina survivors in need of shelter and a multitude of support services after the storm, floods and collapse of the levees.

“The emotional stress of losing everything and the physical toll, especially for older adults, was exacerbated by evacuation, loneliness and isolation—and made us realize we couldn’t comfort everyone who needed connection,” explains Anne Freedman, LCSW, JFS Associate Director. “We went to the bikur cholim conference to see what we could learn.”

What Freedman and her colleagues brought back from the conference was a copy of *Turn to Me*, the documentary about bikur cholim which they planned to use in their trainings, and the understanding to start small in order to best fulfill their promise of support.

“We needed to know that people cared . . . that people who are sick are not invisible, they do matter.”

The staff showed the documentary to the “Terrific Tuesday” bi-monthly social gathering of about 30 older adults, including



Helping to bring Bikur Cholim to Baton Rouge are (left to right) Rabbi Martha Bergadine, Executive Director of Jewish Federation of Baton Rouge; and Jewish Family Service of Greater New Orleans staff: Celia Vine, LCSW; Anne Freedman, LCSW; and Kay Radlauer.

long-time residents and, remarkably, recent evacuees. The “Terrific Tuesday” group became the nucleus for the bikur cholim program, meeting regularly to learn effective ways of visiting people recovering from surgery, falls or illness and planning to visit individuals in private homes, hospitals, nursing homes or assisted living residences.

“By starting small, we were able to send a staff member with a volunteer for the first visit,” notes Freedman. “We were able to introduce the visitor and visatee so people didn’t feel unsafe or unsupported.” For volunteers who were permanent residents of Baton Rouge, bikur cholim brought a sense of usefulness during difficult times. For evacuees, many of whom felt like strangers in a strange land, bikur cholim

became a bridge to becoming members of a new community.

“What the experience of the storm and floods taught us is what we need when we’re in trouble,” says Freedman. “We needed to know that people cared about what was happening to us. And that’s what bikur cholim is – that people who are sick are not invisible, that they do matter.”

Freedman is now in the early stages of starting a bikur cholim group in New Orleans as the city and community struggle to rebuild. The efforts undertaken in Baton Rouge and now in New Orleans are a powerful testimony to founder Rabbi Isaac Trainin’s original vision: bikur cholim as a unifying presence through acts of loving-kindness. □

**Study. Meet. Discuss.
Bikur Cholim Shabbat
Parshat Vayera**

November 15, 2008

To learn more:



www.bikurcholimcc.org



Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services

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Join us Sunday, November 9, 2008 8:30 am – 3:30 pm

21st Annual Bikur Cholim Conference

"I Will Awaken the Dawn"

The Transformative Power of Bikur Cholim

UJA-Federation of New York

130 East 59th Street (between Lexington and Park Avenues)

Co-Sponsored by The Rabbi Isaac N. Trainin Bikur Cholim Coordinating Council/Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services and UJA-Federation of New York

Keynote Speaker: Rabbi Marvin Tokayer

Former Air Force chaplain, Holocaust expert on "righteous persons," noted author and pulpit Rabbi

Raves from conference goers:

"Excellent sessions. Wonderful new suggestions."

"Very concrete ways to visit and how to be of service to ourselves and our families."

A broad selection of workshops to stimulate and inspire.

Learn skills for life which you can put into practice immediately.

Come to this year's conference – and see for yourself!

For information:

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