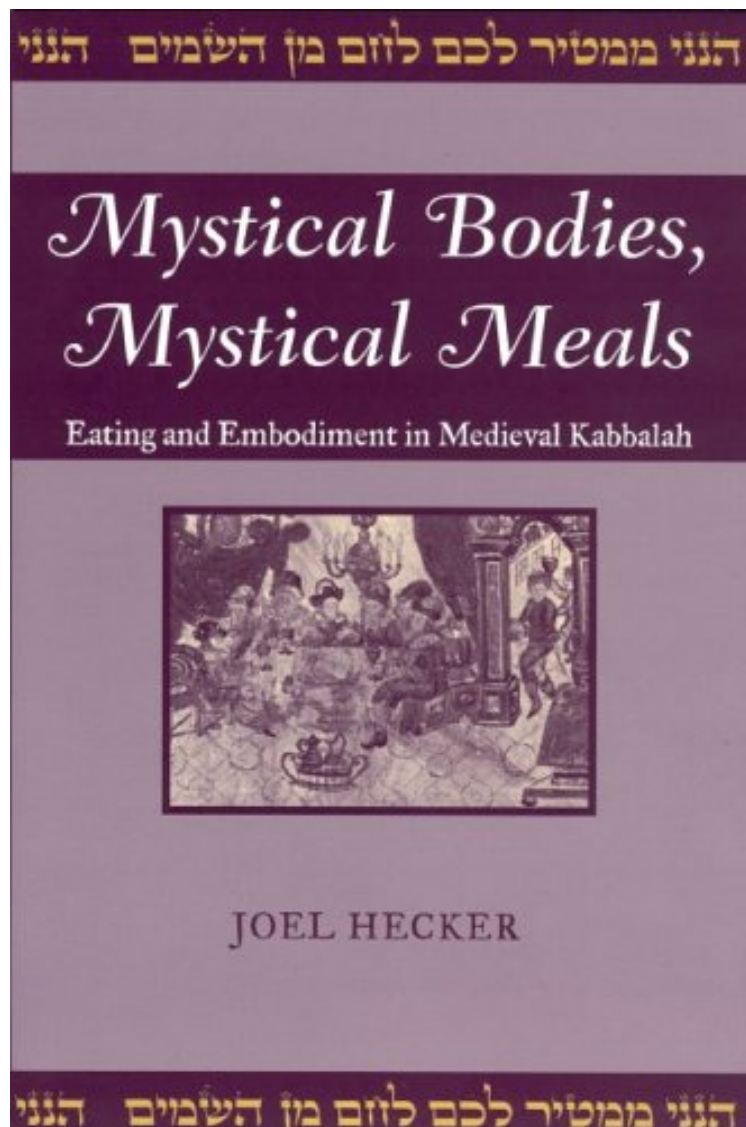


(Ebook free) *Mystical Bodies, Mystical Meals: Eating and Embodiment in Medieval Kabbalah* (Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology)

Mystical Bodies, Mystical Meals: Eating and Embodiment in Medieval Kabbalah (Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology)

Joel Hecker

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Joel Hecker : Mystical Bodies, Mystical Meals: Eating and Embodiment in Medieval Kabbalah (Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Mystical Bodies, Mystical Meals: Eating and Embodiment in Medieval Kabbalah* (Raphael

Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A fine pairing
By David Moyal
From a chef's point of view looking for meaning into the ritual foods we prepare, this book is an indispensable source. Sifting through kabbalistic works to reference the mystical relations with food is not an easy task that Dr. Hecker makes very digestible.
6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Ki Tov: The Mystical Companions eat as they learn
By Jeff Shapiro
The day I looked, .com referenced 63,954 items relevant to `food`; fourteen of them dealt with eating as a mystical undertaking. Joel Hecker's *Mystical Bodies, Mystical Meals* is not just an introduction to issues of food preparation and eating in Medieval Kabbalah, it opens the door to a wider, carefully studied understanding of one segment of Jewish mysticism. Dr. Hecker has been well-trained in academic appreciation of the relationship between bodily and mystical adventures. After a prologue dealing with food and food-laws in pre-medieval Judaism, he shows how much of Kabbalah, especially the Zohar, is effected by dining. Idealized foods, mystical satiation, and etiquette are among the issues of focus; the conversations of the Zoharic companions, and their eating practices, are the data from which generalizations are drawn. The study became more interesting and clearer for me as he approached the possibility of exerting influence on the Creator, as it were. Following the quotation "Blessing does not rest on an empty place", he investigates that possibility, known as theurgy. Dr. Hecker suggests that talismanic theurgy, the use of a material object to bring Divine energies into the world, is most relevant in the study of pre-, para-, and post-prandial Zoharic meetings, conversations, and illuminations. Since it is possible to prepare and eat food only for the sake of the body, the author is careful to differentiate this approach from the mystical intentions described in the Zohar and other sources, and yet to show how important the body is for an understanding of the mystical mission. It has been argued by Gershon Scholem, and others, that, in mystical pursuits, the "craving for food and sleep or anything else is annihilated." Again, this book shows how that concept is not entirely, or perhaps not even generally true in Jewish mysticism. *Mystical Bodies, Mystical Meals* is not for the absolute beginner; one would want to be already comfortable with medieval studies, or with cultural approaches to food and meals, or with mysticism generally, or, more helpfully, with Jewish mysticism particularly. Given that, however, and a willingness to dig deeply into what becomes a fascinating, careful review, the book is highly recommended.
2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A fascinating scholarly work - accessible to all...
By Customer
In "Mystical Bodies, Mystical Meals," Joel Hecker has written a fascinating work on eating in Medieval Kabbalah. Since the uninitiated may not be aware of the central role played by food in the Kabbalah, it suffices to point out that the Zohar itself opens by drawing an analogy between Knesset Yisrael and the Kiddush cup. So Hecker's book goes to the very heart of the Kabbalah. The book is meant primarily as a meticulous work of academic scholarship, and so the novice reader may find it difficult going at first; in this case it would be helpful to consult an introduction to the Kabbalah, such as that found in Daniel Matt's "Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment." And yet the charm of this book is that its theme - food - makes it accessible to all. For example, as an observant Jew, I found that the insights of the Kabbalah into common practices deeply enriched my own observance. To cite just one example - the somewhat perplexing practice of eating a festive meal on the eve of the Yom Kippur fast - the book quotes the Zohar as suggesting that this may have the function of making the fast more challenging - enabling us to better fulfill the Torah's admonition to "afflict your souls". In short, this book is to be heartily recommended, not just for the scholar of the Kabbalah, but also for all those who are interested in the role of food in Jewish practice and thought.

Mystical Bodies, Mystical Meals is the first book-length study of mystical eating practices and experiences in the kabbalah. Focusing on the Jewish mystical literature of late-thirteenth-century Spain, author Joel Hecker analyzes the ways in which the Zohar and other contemporaneous literature represent mystical attainment in their homilies about eating. What emerges is not only consideration of eating practices but, more broadly, the effects such practices and experiences have on the bodies of its practitioners. Using anthropology, sociology, ritual studies, and gender theory, Hecker accounts for the internal topography of the body as imaginatively conceived by kabbalists. For these mystics, the physical body interacts with the material world to effect transformations within themselves and within the Divinity. The kabbalists experience the ideal body as one of fullness, one whose boundaries allow for the intake of divine light and power, and for the outward overflow of fruitfulness and generosity; at the same time, the body retains sufficient integrity to confer a sense of completeness, as the perfect symbol for the Divinity itself. Nourishment imagery is used throughout the kabbalah as a metaphor signifying the flow of divine blessing from the upper worlds to the lower, from masculine to feminine, and from Israel to the Godhead. The body's spiritual continuity allows for unions between the kabbalistic devotee and his food, table, chair, and wine and is exemplified in the practices and experiences surrounding the consumption of food; this continuity is also applicable to other aspects of embodiment, such as the kabbalist's union with his fellow man. *Mystical Bodies, Mystical Meals* underscores the homosocial quality of the kabbalistic fraternity, in which gendered hierarchies of master and disciple are linked to the imagery and dynamics of nourishment and sexuality. Bringing this entire spectrum into focus, Hecker ultimately considers how the oral cavity and stomach, even the emotions associated with festive meals, are mobilized to produce the soul of the

mystical saint in medieval kabbalah.

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About the Author Joel Hecker is associate professor of Jewish mysticism at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.