

Manna

Howard Schwartz

The people went around gathering it. [NUMBERS 11:8]

Every morning
we crawl out of our tents
and make our way into the desert,
each in his own direction,
to gather words scattered in the sands
that have fallen overnight
from heaven.

Some rise even earlier,
before dawn,
to catch the words as they drift down,
believing words caught in this way
are more potent
than those gathered
where they fell.

Some days we come back
with an armful of possibilities,
some days with only a few scattered words
that refuse to reveal their meaning.
Even then we scrutinize them,
rearranging them endlessly,
hoping to discern their mystery.

We depend on this heavenly beneficence
to sustain us. Without it,
the desert would be barren,
our lives unbearable.
Above all, we relish the double portion
that falls before the Sabbath
to keep us during our day of rest.



HOWARD SCHWARTZ is the author of four books of poems, *Vessels*, *Gathering the Sparks*, *Sleepwalking Beneath the Stars*, and *Breathing in the Dark*. He is also the co-editor (with Anthony Rudolf) of *Voices Within the Ark: The Modern Jewish Poets*. His other books include *Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism*, which won the National Jewish Book Award in 2005 and *Leaves from the Garden of Eden: One Hundred Classic Jewish Tales*, published in 2008.