

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مَا لَكُمْ إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمْ أَنْفِرُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ  
 أَثَقَلْتُمْ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ أَرْضَيْتُمْ بِالْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا مِنَ الْآخِرَةِ فَمَا مَتَّعُ  
 الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا فِي الْآخِرَةِ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ ﴿٣٨﴾

*At-Tauba (The Repentance) 9:38*

**O You Who Believe!**

- What is the matter with you?
- That, when you are asked to go forth in the cause of Allah, you cling heavily to the earth?
- Do you prefer the life of this world to the Hereafter?
- But little is the comfort of this life, as compared with the Hereafter.

**Commentary**

Allamah Taba Tabai (AR)

This verse is about the signs and the conditions of the hypocrites and about the hardships the Muslims had to bear because of their craftiness. In the beginning the verse chastises the Muslims as to why they hesitate from going to battle and narrates the help that God intends to give to His Messenger and how He helped him when he came out of Makkah forlorn and helpless.

God says, *"O you who believe! What is the matter with you, that, when ye are asked to go forth in the cause of Allah, ye cling heavily to the earth?"*

The word "iththaqaltum or cling heavily" was actually "Tathaqultum" like "Adarku" which actually was "Tadarku" etc. Here the sense of preference has been hidden and this is why the use of the word "iLa" which will mean "cling dearly" or "cling heavily". It may also mean "that you are disheartened when you clung to the earth". The "cause of God" is the Jihad for which they were asked to travel.

God said, *"Do ye prefer the life of this world to the Hereafter?"*

It seems that the word "prefer" includes contentment and the term "to the" is often used by us also when we say that "We would prefer some good portion to the whole" or when we say, "We prefer to befriend that person to all of them". What the verse wants to say is that the life of this world is inferior to the life in the hereafter. They however suppose the life in the world to be same as the life in the hereafter and according to this verse they choose the inferior life.

The words, "But little is the comfort of this life, as compared with the Hereafter" speak about this manifest bounty. As we have seen the meaning of the verse is, *O you who believe, what is the matter with you that when the Messenger of God asks you to come out for jihad you show a disinclination. It seems that your heart is not inclined to jihad.*

Do you prefer the life of this world to the life in the hereafter? If it is, then you should be aware that the life in this world is very inferior to the life in the hereafter.

The Mumins (believers) have been chastised very harshly both in this verse and the next and as we learn this verse has the background of the battle of Tabuk. The punishment we are chastised about is complete in every sense with no conditions attached to it and so we have no valid reason to assume it to be the punishment in the hereafter. This, because the tone of the verse suggest that this may be punishment in this world or we take it to be the punishment both in this world and the hereafter.

### **A Discussion on tradition**

The author says that scrutiny of the verses before and after this story are connected with this tradition since the verses chastise the Momins or the common people, and the words " Illa tansuru" of the verse of the cave also point towards the same. The disinclination in the words "O you who believe! What is the matter with you, that, when you are asked to go forth in the cause of Allah, you cling heavily to the earth" is clearly about not all the Muslims. One such group came out to fight on the call of Messenger willingly and without fear while only some Muslims and the hypocrites showed disinclination.

The address "O you who believe" is for all the Muslims and the chastisement that comes next is for a certain specific group of Muslims. The generality of this address is very common in various places in the Qur'an like Baqarah (91) "Why then did you kill Allâh's prophets", was addressed to all the Jews even though all the Jews were not guilty of killing the prophets. Similar verses are very frequent in the Qur'an.

The truth about this form of address in the Qur'an is that it wants to protect the right of the few practicing Muslims so that their rights are not usurped because of their numbers. Just as the common people are included in these form of addresses, so the verse has specified them separately and praised them. In this very chapter there are verses yet to come, the Mumins have been praised and their efforts have been regarded as the best form of being grateful.

God said, "The Believers, men and women, are protectors one of another." Similarly, in other verses that are about the battle of Tabuk the Qur'an berates all the Muslims who are lethargic or show a disinclination.

So, we can say that it includes the Sahaba as well and it means Abubakr, is also included. The later verses are about those people who obeyed instantly and they are praised and thanked.

According to this tradition the words “ unless you forth” that pints towards the people’s lethargy criticizes all Muslims that includes Abubakr too. This shows that Abubakr too did not help the Messenger or was lethargic or reluctant to help him. It does not prove that he helped, but to the contrary it proves that he was reluctant in helping. Then, the words “For Allah did indeed help him, when the unbelievers drove him out: he had no more than one companion” reverts to the fact that the Messenger helped and encouraged him and it is not Abubakr who helped the Messenger.

The readers are well aware that this verse denotes the fact that it is not against anyone helping someone but that God does help and will help the Messenger even if the entire Ummah decides not to do so. This verse proves that on the Day of the Cave, God helped only the Messenger and no one else and this is reiterated and well proven by the words, “then Allah sent down His peace upon him, and strengthened him with forces which you saw not, and humbled to the depths the word of the Unbelievers.’

#### Mir Ahmed Ali (AR) and Aqa Mahdi Puya (AR)

The reference is to the defensive expedition of Tabuk in 9 Hijra, to counter the aggression by the Byzantine empire. The people who hesitated to follow the call of Tabuk were deterred by:

- (i) a very long journey in the heat of the summer,
- (ii) the fear of losing the fruit harvest, which was ripe for gathering,
- (iii) the dread of a highly organised, large and formidable foe.

They have been reminded that the comforts of this life are little as compared with the hereafter. Those who hesitated on account of clinging to worldly gains were suffering from a spiritual disease, therefore they have been warned of severe punishment if they failed to obey the Holy Prophet. If a nation receives favours and fails to deserve them, it will be replaced by another, as has often happened in history.

#### Ayatullah Sayyid Kamal Faqih Imani and a Group of Muslim Scholars

It has been narrated by Ibn-Abbas, as well as some others, that this verse and the verse after it have been sent down about the ‘ Battle of Tabuk ’.

Some Islamic narrations indicate that the Prophet of Islam (S) usually did not make manifest the war decisions and his final aims concerning them for Muslims before the beginning of war, in order that the Islamic martial secrets would not be handed to the enemy. But, the situation was different about the Battle of Tabuk, where in advance he announced clearly that they were going to fight against the Romans. That fight against the Emperor of Eastern Byzantine, of course was not a simple matter, and Muslims should be completely prepared for that great war.

In addition to that, the distance between Madina and the country of the Romans was very long and, all things apart, it was summer, the hot season, and the time of harvest for both corns and fruits.

All these affairs with together made the problem of going toward the battlefield extraordinary difficult for the Muslims, so much so that some of them showed hesitation in accepting the Prophet's invitation.

It was in those circumstances that these couple of verses were sent down and, with a very sharp and decisive tone, warned Muslims to be aware of danger, and made them ready to participate in that great war.

#### *Commentary*

As it was cited in the occasions of revelation, the abovementioned verse is about the circumstance of the Battle of Tabuk.

TABUK is a region between Madina and Syria where the bound of Saudi Arabia is located now, and, at that time, it was close to the lands of the Emperor of Eastern Byzantine, which was dominated over Syria. This event happened in the ninth A.H. viz. about one year after the occurrence of Makka Conquest.

With the most intensive manner, the Qur'an invites people unto Holy Struggle. Sometimes it applies some encouraging words, and sometimes some scorning words, and sometimes it threatens them. It addresses people differently and through various ways in order to make them ready. Here, in this verse, at first it says:

*"O' you who have Faith! What (excuse ) have you that when it is said to you. 'Go forth in Allah's way', you should incline heavily to the ground? ..."*

Then, with a reproaching tone, and, referring to the life of this fleeting world and also the vast eternal life in the coming world, it says:

*"...Are you contented with the life of this world instead of the Hereafter? ..."*

Did you do it while the advantages and the amount of the life of this world in comparison with the life in Hereafter is very little? The verse says:

*"...But the enjoyment of the life of this world, compared with the Hereafter, is but little."*

How might a wise person submit such a detrimental exchange? And how does he lose an extraordinary worthy thing for reaching to a worthless little thing?