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See also: BELIEF; BELIEVERS; BEAUTIFUL NAMES OF ALLAH; DISBELIEF; DISBELIEVERS; DISOBEDIENCE; GUIDANCE AND MISGUIDANCE; HEART; HYPOCRISY AND HYPOCRITES; IDOLS AND IDOLATRY; IGNORANCE; LAMP; LIGHT; MŪSĀ, UPON HIM PEACE; PARABLES OF THE QURʿĀN; READINGS OF THE QURʿĀN; POLYTHEISM AND POLYTHEISTS; SATAN; TORAH.

MUZAFFAR IQBAL

Dates: See Date Palm

DATE PALM

NAKHL, NAKHLA, NAKHĪL

Definitions and Usage

Nakhl, a tree of the genus *Phoenix dactylifera*, bearing a highly nutritious fruit, is the most-mentioned tree in the Qurʿān; it is a tree of Paradise and of this world. The noun *nakhl* (sing. *nakhla*), from the root *n-kh-l*, can be used both as singular and plural, but it also has another common plural form, *nakhīl* (Rāghib). Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Khalīl al-Farāhidī (100-175/718-791), the author of the earliest Arabic lexicon, *al-ʿAyn*, says *nakhl* refers to selection of the best from various things; Abū al-Ḥusayn Aḥmad Ibn Fāris (329-395/941-1004) concurs: “*nūn-khāʾ* and *lām* [*nakhīl*] denotes selection of the best and in our opinion, *al-nakhl* [the date palm] is so-called because it is the best of all trees that have a trunk; its singular form is *nakhla* [one date palm].”

Abū-l-Faḍl Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Mukarram, Ibn Manzūr (630-711/1233-ca.1312) adds that *nakhla* is the date tree (*shajaratu-l-tamr*); the usual plural form is *nakhl* and *nakhīl* and if the number is between three and ten, it is called *nakhalāt* (*Iṣṣān*). Linguistically, *nakhl* is generally assumed to be feminine, but the people of Najd consider it masculine (Fīrūzābādī). *Nakhla* is also used to denote a place name as in *Baṭn Nakhla* is a place in al-Ḥijāz, between Makka and al-Ṭāʾif (Ibn Manzūr).

The root *n-kh-l* occurs twenty times in the Qurʿān (ʿAbd al-Bāqī) in three different nominal forms: the collective noun *nakhl* occurs eleven times (Q 6:99, 141; 18:32; 20:71; 26:148; 50:10; 54:20; 55:11, 68; 69:7; 80:29); the *nomen unitatis* (i.e. the noun denoting one single piece) “*nakhla*” is used twice (Q 19:23, 25) and the plural form “*nakhīl*” appears seven times (Q 2:266; 13:4; 16:11, 67; 17:91; 23:19; 36:34).

According to some exegetes, palm tree is also implicitly mentioned in Q 14:24, “*Do you not see how Allah sets forth a parable? A goodly word as a goodly tree, whose root is firmly fixed and its branches [reach] to the sky*” where “*goodly tree*” is explained as a reference to the date palm (Samarqandī; Samʿānī; Wāḥidī), although the master exegete Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr, al-Ṭabarī (224-310/839-923) quotes the opinion of Ibn ʿAbbās (3BH-68/619-688) who said that the “*goodly word*” is the testimony of faith (*shahāda*) (see: PILLARS OF ISLAM) or it is a reference to a Believer (*q.v.*) (Ṭabarī; Makkī).

Related Terms

Thirteen other terms refer to date palm or its parts:

- i. “*‘ajāz* (pl. of *‘ajuz*)”—trunks of the palm tree (Q 54:20; 69:7);
- ii. “*akmām* (pl. of *kumm*)”—the date bud, calyx (Q 41:47; 55:11), the material that covers the fruit (*al-thamra*), as in Q 55:11: *Therein is fruit and palm trees with sheaths* [of dates];
- iii. “*dusur* [sing. *disār*]”—palm fiber, mentioned once (Q 54:13) and explained as *mismār/masāmīr*—nail(s)—used to put together wooden planks (Qurṭubī; Ibn al-Jawzī; Ibn Kathīr). Ibn Manẓūr says it is a kind of palm fiber cord (*khayṭ min lif*) with which wooden parts of a ship are held together;
- iv. “*haḍīm*”—used once in Q 26:148, *and tilled fields and heavily-sheathed palm-trees*, from the root *h-ḍ-m*, which means “to crush something soft”, thus “*tal’uhā haḍīm* denotes dates which, because of their softness appear to have been crushed; it also refers to the entrance of one part into another” (Zajjāj);
- v. “*jidh’* (pl. *judhū’*)”—palm trunk (Q 19:23, 25; 20:71). This part of the date palm is also mentioned in a hadith narrated by Jābir b. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr b. Ḥarām al-Anṣārī (d. 78/697; see: Dhahabī, Juz’ 3, No. 38): “The roof of the Mosque [in al-Madīna al-Munawwara] was built upon trunks of date palms (*masqūfan ‘alā judhū’ in min nakhlīn*) serving as pillars. When the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, delivered a sermon (*idhā khaṭaba*), he used to stand by one of those trunks until a pulpit (*minbar*) was made for him. When he stood on the pulpit, we heard the trunk weeping, with a sound like that of a ten-month-pregnant she-camel (*ka-ṣawṭ al-‘ishār*), until the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, came to it and put his hand upon it, then it became quiet” (Bukhārī, K. al-manāqib, bāb ‘alāmāt al-nubuwwa fī-l-Islām);
- vi. “*līna*”—a hapax legomenon in Q 59:5, understood by the successor-exegete Mujāhid b. Jabr (21-104/642-722) as referring to any species of date palm (Makkī); al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī (343-502/ca. 954-1108) concurs. Abū-l-Faraj Jamāl al-Dīn, Ibn al-Jawzī al-Qurashī al-Baghdādī (510-597/ca.1116-1200) offers six meanings of *līna*: (i) it is date palm (*al-nakhl*) laden with *‘ajwa* dates; (ii) dates and trees together; (iii) all kinds of date palms except *al-‘ajwa* and *al-barniyya* [a roundish, superior quality date with excessive yellow and red color]; (iv) all species of date palm; (v) [only the most] excellent quality date-palms; and (vi) a specific kind of date palm together with its fruit which is called *al-lawn* that has intense yellow color; it is so transparent that even its pit can be seen from outside the fruit” (*Zād*);
- vii. “*masad*”—fibers which appear at the roots of palm branches, another hapax legomenon in the Qur’ān (Q 111:5, which, “in the language of the Arabs is a rope made of date palm fibers” (Zajjāj). “It is a synonym of *lif* (palm fibers) or anything twisted together, may it be made of date palm fibers or of any other material” (Ibn al-Jawzī);
- viii. “*naqīr*”—the speck on a date pit or the groove in the date stone, mentioned twice (Q 4:53, 124), and defined as “a tiny cavity (*waqba*) on the surface of the date pit” (Rāghib). Ibn al-Jawzī says, “it can refer to a tiny speck on the date pit or the covering membrane (*al-qishr*) around the middle of the date pit, or it is the date pit itself (*ḥabbat al-nawāt*)”;
- ix. “*nawā*”—the date pit, used once (Q 6:95), “is the dry seed from which Allah Most High brings forth green leaves (Zajjāj); the noun is especially used for the date palm (Wāḥidī, *Wajīz*);
- x. “*qinwān* [sing. *qinw* and *qinw*]”—fruit of the date palm when it is ripe, also used for the fruit stalks, mentioned once (Q 6:99) and understood as a “bunch of dates”, its synonym is “*‘adhq* pl. *‘adhāq*” (Rāghib); more specifically, bunches of dates hanging down toward the earth (Ṭabarī);
- xi. “*qīṭmūr*” from the root *q-ṭ-m-r*—“the white dot on the date pit; it is metaphorically used for a base and low-value thing” (Rāghib); it appears once (Q 35:13) to denote the utter powerlessness of those whom the disbelievers associate with Allah Most High Who *causes the night to enter the day, and He causes the day to enter the night and He has subjected the sun and the moon—each running [its course] for a specified term—that is Allah, your Lord; to Him belongs sovereignty. And those whom you invoke other than Him do not have power over a qīṭmūr*;
- xii. “*tal’*”—used once (Q 50:10) as *tal’un naḍīd*,