

# The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

## BEES AND FRUITS

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It is not uncommon to find critics of the Quran asserting that it is in error in verse 16:69 when making a reference to bees and their consumption of fruits.

Let us note the verse in full along with its contextual verses:

### 016.066

"And indeed, in the cattle is a lesson. From what is in their bellies from between the bowel contents and blood, We produce for you drink, milk, pure and palatable to those who drink it."

### 016.067

"And from the **fruits** (Arabic: thamarati) of the date-palm and grapes. you take from it intoxicants and good provision. Indeed in that is a sign for a people who use reason."

### 016.068

"And your Lord inspired to the bee, "Take for yourself among the mountains, houses, and among the trees and [in] that which they construct."

### 016.069

"Then eat of from **all the fruits** (Arabic: kulli thamarati) and follow the ways of your Lord made smooth. There comes forth from within their bellies a beverage of many colours, in which there is healing for mankind. Indeed, there is a sign in this for a people who reflect."

At the heart of the contention, there appears to be two main areas of criticism and counterclaims:

[1] - Bees don't eat fruits

[2] - Bees don't convert fruits to honey

With regards [1], the contention is wholly unwarranted.

Even to the casual enquirer, it is well-documented that bees do indeed **eat from fruits**. Given that the Quranic context is positing the notion of the '**consumption / eating**' of a *common commodity* (i.e. fruits) with a view to provide an apt analogy between both humans (16:67) and bees (16:69), any mention of 'eating' flowers would be arguably **misplaced**, as this would only be exclusive to bees.

Furthermore, in extreme arid environments such as the Arabian Peninsula where the Quran was revealed, it is plausible to assume that flora would not be in abundant supply (nectar dearth) and the primary audience of the Quran would have been more likely to witness their particular variety / species of bees foraging on fruits rather than flowers. This possibility cannot be simply dismissed.

With regards [2], the Quran **does not categorically state** that bees convert fruits to honey. **This is an interpolation**. There are two parts to the verse.

#### 016.069

"Then eat of from **all the fruits** (Arabic: kulli thamarati) and follow the ways of your Lord made smooth (Arabic: fa-us'luki subula rabbiki dhululan). There comes forth from within their bellies a beverage of many colours, in which there is healing for mankind. Indeed, there is a sign in this for a people who reflect."

The first part of the verse makes a contextual comparison between humans and bees with regards to the consumption of fruits as a provision. The second part of the verse speaks of a '**process**' which is to be **followed** which the Quran **does not define** -'and follow the ways of your Lord made smooth' (**fa-us'luki subula rabbiki dhululan**). **Whatever** that process may be, whether it is the collection of nectar or nectar + fruits + other foraged constituents, the subsequent result leads to a production of a drink/beverage useful to humans.

ثُمَّ كُلِي مِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ فَاسْلُكِي سُبُلَ رَبِّكِ ذُلُلًا يَخْرُجُ مِنْ بُطُونِهَا شَرَابٌ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهُ فِيهِ شِفَاءٌ لِلنَّاسِ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ (٦٩)

fa-us'luki subula rabbiki dhululan

Illustration - Joseph Islam

Finally, the Arabic term '**thamarati**' or more importantly, '**kulli thamarati**' (all the fruits) can arguably be interpreted as a reference to capture **all wholesome 'produce'** that the earth provides to serve the purpose of goodly consumption. It has the inherent meaning of something which provides **increase, to bring fertility or an advantage**.

The term also includes trees and shrubs and more importantly for the purpose of this article, flowers.

which disappears in summer.

(ثمر) *samar*, U, INF. *sumûr*, bear fruit; get rich; gather brushwood;— II. INF. *tasûr*, cause to bear fruit; increase, heap up riches; form buds;— IV. INF. *ismâr*, bear fruit; be fertile; be or get rich; purpose;— X. *istismâr*, endeavour to make a thing bear fruit or bring advantage; consider fertile or advantageous; have the usufruct or profit; gather.

ثمر *samar*, ð, pl. *simâr*, *sumur*, *asmâr*, fruit; produce, gain, advantage, profit; possessions, riches; gold, silver; knot at the top of a whip;— *samir*, plentiful, much, many;— *sumr*, *sumur*, plenty of riches;— ð *samara-t*, *samura-t*, pl. *-ât*, fruit-tree; descendant; consequence, result; tip of the tongue;— *samira-t*, sweetness; friendship.

Source: [1]

*wealth*, (T, S,) *increased and multiplied*: (S:) or *various kinds of property or wealth*, (I'Ab, M, K,) *increased and multiplied*, and *gained*, or *acquired, for oneself*: (I'Ab, B:) or, accord. to Mujâhid, ثمر, in the Ḳur, means *fruit*; and ثمر, *property, or wealth*; but Yoo did not admit this, app. holding both to mean the same: (T:) in the Ḳur xviii. 32, AA read ثمر, and explained it as signifying *kinds of property or wealth*. (S.) — ثمر also signifies † *Gold and silver*: (AAF, M, K:) so accord. to Mujâhid in the Ḳur xviii. 32; but this is not known in the proper language. (AAF, M.) — And *Trees* [or *shrubs*]: (TA:) and ثمر a tree [or shrub]. (Th, M, K.

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [2]

For example, in verse 2:22 the Quran mentions rain assisting fruit growth, but does not mention flowers which by the same process, it would also assist.

002:022

"The One who made the earth a resting place for you and the heaven / sky a canopy and (Who) sends down water from the sky then **brings forth with it** (Arabic: fa-akhrāja bihi) **of the fruits** (Arabic: thamarati) as a provision. Therefore, do not set up rivals to God while you know."

In the above verse, it is interesting to note the direct connection of rainwater with the growth of fruits. On the contrary, in verse 16:69 there does not appear to be a similar direct connection which leads to the production of honey. Instead, it is separated by a process as discussed above.

Finally, we note below that the term does indeed admit a reference to **flowers**.

ثَامِرٌ : see 4. — ثَامِرُ الْجَلْبَرِ † *Perfect, or complete, in respect of forbearance, or clemency; like ripe fruit.* (IAar, M.) — الثَّامِرُ The flower of the حمّاض [or rose-coloured sorrel]; (AḤn, M, K;) which is red. (TA.) — The لُوبِيَاء [dolichos lubia of Forskål]. (AḤn, M, K.)

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [3]

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## FINAL THOUGHTS

In summary, the article posited that:

- (1) Bees do indeed eat from fruits.
- (2) The Quran provides for the context in which an example of fruits is shared as common commodities that both humans and bees eat/consume for their benefit.
- (3) Different species of bees exist and the arid conditions of Arabia may lead to bees being witnessed foraging on fruits.
- (4) The Quran does not categorically state that the consumption of fruit directly leads to the production of honey. Rather a 'process' of sorts leads to a beverage being created in the stomach of bees.
- (5) The Arabic word (thamarah) does indeed admit shades of meanings. Apart from fruits, it also carries the meaning of something which provides an increase, to bring fertility or an advantage and to produce in general which also includes trees, shrubs **and flowers**.

## REFERENCES

[1] STEINGASS. F, *Arabic-English Dictionary 1884; London Crosby Lockwood and Son, Page 209*

Highlights marked in red on the lexicon excerpt are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

[2] LANE. E.W, *Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 1, Page 353*

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[3] **ibid.**

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