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Rutab, Tawakkul, and Consolation in Sūrah Maryam: Material Aptness and Exegetical Coherence in Q 19:22–26

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Abstract

The Qur'ānic account of Maryam's childbirth in Sūrah Maryam (19:22–26) presents, in a remarkably compressed narrative, the convergence of bodily vulnerability, divine solicitude, and theological instruction. Classical exegetical discussions repeatedly mark the scene as extraordinary: the palm tree is variously described as dry, severed, or fruiting outside its normal season, thereby indicating that the descent of fruit transcends ordinary agricultural causality. Yet the Qur'ānic diction is not merely miraculous in general terms; it is materially precise, specifying rutab, fresh ripe dates, at the very moment of delivery. This article aims to examine the exegetical and theological significance of that precision by asking how the command to shake the palm trunk, the imperatives to eat and drink, and the reassurance qarrī 'aynan function as a coherent sequence of divine care. Methodologically, the study adopts a close textual and semantic reading of Q 19:22–26, engages major classical tafsīr traditions, and places their insights in conversation with the theological framework of tawakkul and al-akhdh bi-l-asbāb, alongside selected modern nutritional and clinical discussions on the physiological relevance of dates in childbirth. The analysis shows that Q 19:25 differs meaningfully from Maryam's unmediated provision in Q 3:37: here, divine provision is coupled with commanded human action, without compromising reliance upon God. It further demonstrates that qarrī 'aynan denotes not only emotional comfort but a restored composure grounded in the child's presence and the vindication soon to unfold. The discussion argues that the specification of rutab is therefore not incidental but integral to the passage's inner logic. Bodily nourishment, emotional restoration, and divine mercy are woven into a single literary-theological structure in which material aptness becomes an exegetical sign of Qur'ānic precision.

Keywords: Maryam, Qur'ān 19:25–26, rutab, qarrī 'aynan, tawakkul, sabab, nazm

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Introduction

The account of Maryam's childbirth in Sūrat Maryam (19:22–26) is among the most compressed passages in the Qur'ān. In only a few āyāt, the text gathers withdrawal, pain, divine address, and birth. At the center stands the divine command:

(وَهَزِي إِلَيْكَ بِجَذْعِ النَّخْلَةِ تُسَاقِطُ عَلَيْكَ رُطْبًا جَنِيًّا فَكُلِي وَاشْرَبِي وَقَرِّي عَيْنًا)
(Qur'ān 19:25–26)

Maryam is told to shake the trunk of the palm tree, then to eat, to drink, and to be at ease. Exertion precedes nourishment; nourishment precedes repose. Relief arrives in a form suited to physical hardship, and the ordering of these imperatives is itself part of the meaning.

The early *mufasssīrūn* gave careful attention to these āyāt. They discussed the condition of the palm tree, the kind of fruit that fell, and the sense of *qarrī 'aynan*. More recent scholarship on Maryam has shifted emphasis toward sanctity, gender, genealogy, and the Qur'ān's relation to Late Antique traditions (Stowasser, 1994; Neuwirth, 2019). Research on dates has similarly tended to address nutritional and obstetric benefit apart from the Qur'ānic setting in which *rutab* appears (Al-Farsi & Lee, 2008; Al-Kuran et al., 2011). Yet the naming of *rutab* in Q 19:25 belongs to the inner coherence of the āyah and bears directly on what follows.

A comparison with Q 3:37 sharpens the interpretive issue. There, Zakariyyā enters upon Maryam in the miḥrāb and finds sustenance already present, without any act on her part. In Q 19:25, she is commanded to move toward what is given. What had earlier arrived without visible mediation is here conditioned on bodily action (Al-Ṭabarī, 1954–1969; Ibn Kathīr, 1998). The difference raises a theological question about why divine help is disclosed through commanded movement rather than immediate gift.

The verse is also precise in naming the fruit. The Qur'ān designates *rutaban janiyyān* rather than dates generically: soft, moist fruit at the precise stage of immediate readiness. The commands to eat and drink leave their objects open, while the provision itself is named in a particular form. Attending to the lexical tradition and to the ordering of the āyah, where sequence, specification, and selective omission all carry interpretive weight, reveals why that naming matters.

Modern nutritional research plays a secondary but clarifying role in this reading. Fresh dates provide readily available sugars, minerals, fiber, and antioxidant compounds (Al-Farsi & Lee, 2008). Clinical studies have associated date consumption in late pregnancy with greater cervical readiness and aspects of labor progression (Al-Kuran et al., 2011; Salajegheh et al., 2024).

These findings do not determine tafsīr, but they make visible what classical exegetes perceived within a theological rather than clinical frame: that *rutab* is especially apt at a moment of acute bodily depletion. The article addresses three questions: how the command to shake the trunk should be read against Q 3:37; what *qarrī ‘aynan* adds in a context of pain, fear, and imminent vindication; and why *rutaban janiyyān* is named with the exactness the text displays.

2. Extraordinary Provision and Theological Reframing

The childbirth scene in Sūrat Maryam gains clarity when placed beside the earlier scene of provision in Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān. There the Qur’ān states that whenever Zakariyyā entered the sanctuary he found sustenance already with her:

﴿كَلَّمَا دَخَلَ عَلَيْهَا زَكَرِيَّا الْمِحْرَابَ وَجَدَ عِنْدَهَا رِزْقًا﴾
(Qur’ān 3:37)

Classical tafsīr treats this as extraordinary provision. Al-Ṭabarī transmits reports from early authorities, among them Ibn ‘Abbās and Mujāhid, that Zakariyyā found fruits appearing out of season, summer fruits in winter and winter fruits in summer (Al-Ṭabarī, 1954–1969, commentary on Q 3:37). Maryam’s *rizq* arrived in a manner not explained by ordinary agricultural process. Ibn Kathīr reads the scene in the same spirit, as a *karāmah* granted by God to one of His righteous servants (Ibn Kathīr, 1998, commentary on Q 3:37). Al-Bayḍāwī notes that the unqualified term *rizq* in Q 3:37 draws attention to the divine source of the provision rather than to its form or composition (Al-Bayḍāwī, n.d., commentary on Q 3:37).

The childbirth narrative structures provision differently. In the sanctuary, sustenance appeared without visible effort on Maryam’s part. At childbirth, help is joined to command:

﴿وَهَزِي إِلَيْكَ بِجِدْعِ النَّخْلَةِ﴾
(Qur’ān 19:25)

She is commanded to shake the trunk herself. Divine care remains fully present but is disclosed through movement, effort, and response.

2.1 The Condition of the Palm in the Exegetical Tradition

Exegetes gave considerable attention to the state of the palm when Maryam received the command. Al-Ṭabarī records several reports: some describe the trunk as dry, which underscores the miraculous character of what follows;

others state that the fruit appeared outside its normal season; still others report that the trunk had been severed before becoming fruit-bearing (Al-Ṭabarī, 1954–1969, commentary on Q 19:25). Al-Ṭabarī treats these differences as secondary: whether the tree was dry, out of season, or severed, the fruit did not fall as an ordinary agricultural event.

Ibn Kathīr approaches the same point from another angle. A woman weakened by labor would not be capable of shaking a palm trunk in a way that causes dates to fall naturally; Maryam’s action is real, but its efficacy belongs to divine will operating through her movement as its visible occasion (Ibn Kathīr, 1998, commentary on Q 19:25). The tafsīr tradition holds both elements simultaneously: the event remains extraordinary, and Maryam acts within it.

2.2 Commanded Action and the Theology of Means

The imperative **وَهَزِّي** derives from the verb *hazz*, to shake or move forcefully. Al-Ṭabarī glosses it as **حَرَكَهَا**, indicating deliberate physical motion directed toward the trunk (Al-Ṭabarī, 1954–1969, commentary on Q 19:25). The phrasing **بِجِدْعِ النَّخْلَةِ** introduces the object of that motion through the preposition *bi-*, a standard Arabic usage signaling direct physical engagement with the trunk itself.

The passage carries theological weight precisely because it enacts rather than merely states the doctrine of *al-akhdh bi-l-asbāb*. In classical Islamic thought, *tawakkul* means relying on God while taking the means He has placed in the world, without attributing independent causal power to those means. Al-Ghazālī articulates this in the *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*: created causes do not act on their own authority, yet to neglect them entirely is a misunderstanding of what genuine reliance on God requires (Al-Ghazālī, n.d., vol. 4, Kitāb al-Tawakkul). Maryam is commanded to act, and the fruit falls by the will of God through her action as its visible occasion.¹

2.3 Sequence of Action and Restoration

After the command to shake the trunk, the passage moves through four steps in fixed order: shaking, eating, drinking, then composure. Exertion comes

¹ *Tawakkul* is treated here in its exegetical application to commanded action, specifically the framework by which Maryam’s movement functions as a theologically legible occasion for divine provision, and not as a subject of systematic doctrinal analysis.

first; nourishment follows; inward settling comes last. Each step presupposes the one before it, and the sequence responds to Maryam’s condition with economy rather than elaboration. Mir has demonstrated that Qur’ānic discourse characteristically exhibits *naẓm*, an internal coherence in which successive elements form a unified rhetorical design, with each part carrying weight in relation to the whole (Mir, 1986, pp. 55–72, developing Islāhī’s concept). The four-step sequence of Q 19:25–26 illustrates this kind of structural intentionality: no step is redundant, and the ordering itself participates in the meaning.

3. Qarrī ‘Aynan: Relational Composure and Qur’ānic Semantics

The final imperative in the verse takes the form:

(وَقَرِّي عَيْنًا)
(Qur’ān 19:25–26)

Placed after the imperatives to eat and drink, this phrase introduces the emotional register and completes the fourfold structure of the verse. The root *q-r-r* carries the core meanings of coolness, stillness, and settledness after agitation. Classical Arabic lexicographers explain *qurrat al-‘ayn* as a metaphor for emotional tranquility: Ibn Manẓūr records that the phrase refers to a state in which the eye becomes cool after the heat of sorrow or distress (Ibn Manẓūr, 1994). The metaphor rests on an older cultural association between emotional states and physical sensation: in Arabic idiom, grief was associated with heat, while joy and relief were associated with coolness. The cooling of the eye marks the cessation of agitation and the restoration of inward stability. When the Qur’ān employs the imperative *قَرِّي* in the feminine singular, the verse functions as a divine reassurance that Maryam’s anguish will give way to composure.

3.1 Lexical and Qur’ānic Usage

Qurrat al-‘ayn appears elsewhere in the Qur’ān in contexts where consolation is tied to the presence of a child. One clear instance occurs in the story of Mūsā, when the wife of Pharaoh says upon finding the infant:

(فَرَّتْ عَيْنَ لِي وَآلِكَ)
(Qur’ān 28:9)

Here the expression names a response produced by the child himself. A related usage appears in the supplication in Sūrat al-Furqān:

(رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ)
(Qur’ān 25:74)

In both passages, the repose expressed by *qurrat al-‘ayn* is relational: it arises through persons whose presence becomes a source of reassurance rather than through contentment in the abstract. In Sūrat Maryam, this relational sense is crucial. The newborn child will shortly speak in defense of his mother, and the command *qarrī ‘aynan* addresses Maryam in her present exhaustion while pointing toward the coming reversal. This reading is consistent with the lexical tradition. Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī links the root *q-r-r* to settledness after disturbance (Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, 1992). Al-Zamakhsharī reads the command as reassurance after distress; al-Qurṭubī glosses it in terms of relief and repose within the trial Maryam is undergoing (Al-Zamakhsharī, 1987, commentary on Q 19:26; Al-Qurṭubī, 1964, commentary on Q 19:26). Al-Ālūsī observes that the grammatical shift from past (narrative) to imperative (direct address) at this moment of the passage signals a divine presence entering the scene with immediacy (Al-Ālūsī, 1994, commentary on Q 19:26).

3.2 Emotional Force and the Moment of Distress

The emotional force of the command is best understood alongside Maryam’s earlier declaration:

(يَا لَيْتَنِي مِتُّ قَبْلَ هَذَا وَكُنْتُ نَسِيًّا مَنْسِيًّا)
(Qur’ān 19:23)

Classical commentators interpret this declaration as an expression of the social dread Maryam anticipates upon returning to her people with a newborn child. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī explains that her fear concerns the accusations she expects from her community rather than any doubt about God’s protection (Al-Rāzī, 1999, commentary on Q 19:23). Some exegetical readings widen this to encompass humility in the face of an acute divine trial, without eliminating the social dimension.

The command *عَيْنًا قَرِي* functions within this context as an assurance that her situation will lead to vindication rather than disgrace. The narrative moves immediately toward the scene in which the infant speaks, defending his mother and affirming his prophetic mission. The composure promised in the verse therefore reaches forward toward the events that will soon confirm her innocence. Ibn ‘Āshūr observes that the verse addresses Maryam’s condition in successive stages: physical exhaustion is followed by nourishment and hydration, which culminate in the restoration of composure; the inward settling therefore occurs after her immediate bodily needs have been met (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1984, commentary on Q 19:25–26).

3.3 Bodily Nourishment and Emotional Restoration

The fruit is named with unusual precision: *رَطْبًا جَنِيًّا*, fresh ripe dates ready to be eaten at once. This provision is placed after the strain of shaking the trunk

and before the command *qarrī ‘aynan*. The verse does not treat consolation as separable from the body’s condition. It presents relief in an ordered form: exertion, nourishment, then composure. The naming of *rutab* belongs to the inner logic of the scene in that Maryam, in weakness, receives provision calibrated to her condition before the passage turns to stillness.

4. Rutaban Janiyyan: Lexical Precision and Narrative Fit

The childbirth scene names the fruit and identifies its stage of ripeness:

(تَسَاقَطُ عَلَيْكَ رُطَبًا جَنِيًّا)

(Q 19:25)

Rutab denotes the stage at which the fruit is soft, moist, and ready for immediate consumption. The qualifier *janiyyān* confirms that condition of direct availability. Within the full sequence that follows:

(تَسَاقَطُ عَلَيْكَ رُطَبًا جَنِيًّا فَكُلِي وَاشْرَبِي وَقَرِّي عَيْنًا)

(Q 19:25–26)

the commands to eat and drink leave their objects unspecified, while the provision is named at a specific stage of ripeness. The contrast in specification is analytically revealing, and the following subsections explain why.

4.1 From General Provision to Specified Nourishment

The contrast with Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān is instructive here. In Q 3:37, provision arrives as *rizq* without further description, because what matters there is its divine source: its appearance before Zakariyyā as evidence of Maryam’s election. In Q 19:25, the text has already established divine intervention through the commands themselves. The naming of *rutab* places the provision inside the body’s specific condition; unlike the unspecified *rizq* of Q 3:37, which rests content with establishing source alone, the verse names what she was given and at what stage of ripeness. This ties the act of eating to the body’s immediate need rather than leaving provision as an abstract sign of election.

4.2 The Meaning of Rutab and the Stages of Date Maturation

Modern agronomic studies distinguish several stages of date maturation: *kimri*, *khalal*, *rutab*, and *tamr*, with some studies also identifying an earlier phase known as *hababouk* (Alqahtani et al., 2025; Dowson & Aten, 1962). *Rutab* denotes the stage at which the fruit softens, retains relatively high moisture

content, and is ready for immediate consumption, unlike the drier *tamr*, which is more suitable for storage (Alqahtani et al., 2025; Dowson & Aten, 1962). The Qur’ānic text refers to this soft stage, edible directly from the tree, without preparation or delay.

4.3 Aptness in Classical Exegesis

Classical exegetes did not treat the provision of *rutab* as an incidental detail in the childbirth scene. Early reports already connect it to the condition of the postpartum woman. In his commentary on Q 19:25, al-Baghawī cites al-Rabī b. Khuthaym as saying, “For the woman in *nifās*, nothing is better, in my view, than *rutab*, and for the sick person nothing is better than honey” (Al-Baghawi, n.d.). A related report appears in Ibn Abī Shaybah, who transmits from Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaī that *rutab* used to be recommended for the postpartum woman (Ibn Abi Shaybah, 1989). These reports do not function as clinical proof, but they do show that the association between *rutab* and postpartum need was recognized early. Ibn Kathīr reads the falling fruit within a larger sequence of divine assistance: Maryam is commanded to shake the trunk, water is made available, she is told to eat and drink, and then to recover composure (Ibn Kathir, 1998, commentary on Q 19:25). Al-Rāzī and Ibn ‘Ashūr make the suitability of the provision still clearer. Al-Rāzī places it within a scene marked by bodily strain and social exposure, while Ibn ‘Ashūr draws attention to its fitness for labor and immediate need (Al-Razi, 1999, commentary on Q 19:25–26; Ibn Ashur, 1984, commentary on Q 19:25–26). Ibn al-Qayyim adds a different kind of witness. Writing in a medical-dietetic register rather than an exegetical one, he explains that sweet substances reach the liver quickly and remarks that this receptivity is heightened when the food is *rutab*, so that both the liver and the body’s faculties benefit from it (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, 1991). The immediate context of his discussion is the breaking of the fast, not childbirth, and that distinction should be preserved. Even so, his account remains relevant because it preserves a medical understanding of *rutab* as especially suitable to a body emerging from depletion. Across these readings, the fruit matters because it fits the moment: it belongs to a structure of mercy, relief, and restoration carefully built by the scene itself.

4.4 Material Aptness and the Limits of Clinical Comparison

Modern nutritional research clarifies, in a different register, what classical exegetes perceived within a theological frame. Dates provide readily available sugars as well as potassium, magnesium, fiber, and antioxidant compounds (Al-Farsi & Lee, 2008). Unlike *tamr*, *rutab* retains greater moisture and can be consumed at once (Al-Farsi & Lee, 2008; Alqahtani et al., 2025; Dowson & Aten, 1962). Al-Kuran et al. (2011) found that women who consumed dates in the final weeks of pregnancy presented with greater cervical dilation, higher

rates of spontaneous labor, and reduced need for induction on several measures. A subsequent systematic review identified favorable associations between date consumption and some labor and birth outcomes, while noting heterogeneity across studies and calling for further investigation (Salajegheh et al., 2024).

These findings are not presented as an *ijāz* argument. Their interpretive value lies in rendering the physiological aptness of the Qur'ānic wording perceptible in terms unavailable to classical exegetes: the Qur'ān names a fruit that suits immediate physical need, and contemporary science makes that suitability easier to perceive and assess in physiological terms. The classical exegetes arrived at the same judgment of aptness through theological and nutritional knowledge available in their own context. Modern research confirms the judgment from a different vantage point without altering its exegetical basis.

Conclusion

In the childbirth scene of Sūrat Maryam, the wording is precise at every point. The command to shake the trunk, the descent of *rutaban janiyyān*, the instruction to eat and drink, and the words *qarrī 'aynan* all answer a single reality: Maryam in exhaustion, exposure, and solitude. The wording responds to that reality with unusual care. Placed beside Q 3:37, the contrast between the two scenes carries theological weight. In the earlier passage, provision comes without visible effort on Maryam's part. In Q 19:25, she is commanded to act. Classical exegetes do not reduce that action to ordinary causation, nor do they detach it from divine mercy: the event remains miraculous, but it is narrated through movement and response. Maryam is brought into participation with the provision that meets her.

The same exactness appears in the naming of *rutab*. The Qur'ān designates the fruit at a particular stage, fresh, soft, and ready for immediate consumption, rather than naming dates generically. Classical tafsīr recognized the appropriateness of that choice within a theological frame. Modern nutritional research makes its physiological relevance legible in a different register, particularly in relation to energy, hydration, and recovery after labor. This double judgment of aptness, one arrived at through tafsīr, the other through clinical evidence, is not accidental; it reflects the material precision with which the Qur'ānic text has selected its object. *Qarrī 'aynan* also carries more than a generalized sense of comfort. It names repose after distress, but in this context that repose is not merely inward. Maryam is being prepared for encounter, accusation, and vindication. The reassurance reaches forward toward the trial that follows.

This reading demonstrates that Qur'ānic specificity in naming a material thing is not ornamental. At certain moments, the meaning resides precisely in the naming: *rutab* rather than *tamr*, a distinct stage of ripeness rather than undifferentiated provision, is one such case. What presents as narrative detail is integral to the argument the passage constructs.

Disclaimer

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