

## A Semantic Analysis of "Proximity to God" in the Holy Qur'an with Emphasis on Paradigmatic Relations

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### Abstract

Semantics investigates the transformation of word meanings within discourse. "Proximity to God" is one of the central Qur'anic concepts, and its semantic analysis is of particular importance for organizing the semantic network of Qur'anic vocabulary and for understanding the Book of Revelation's discourse on the relationship between human beings and God. Using a descriptive-analytical method, the present study seeks to identify and systematize the vocabulary related to proximity (*Qurb*) and to explain the process of semantic expansion of this term within the framework of paradigmatic relations. The concept of proximity, in addition to reflecting the human-divine relationship, encompasses a wide range of meanings, including spatial, temporal, kinship-based, rank-related, protective, and power-related proximity. The findings indicate that the direct derivatives of the root (*q r b*), such as *Aqrab*, *Qarīb*, *Qurbān*, and *Qurbāt*, are predominantly employed within the semantic orbit of drawing near to God, whereas words related to *Qurb* in non-religious meanings function as expressions of nearness in non-divine contexts. Among the conceptual substitutes for *Qurb*, terms such as *Dunuww*, *Haḍar*, *Walī*, *Zulfā*, and *Muḥīt* were identified, which respectively cover the domains of physical/spatial proximity, legal and social proximity, proximity in the occurrence of events, rank and status, and encompassing. Furthermore, a group of Qur'anic terms can be regarded as indirect substitutes for *Qurb* and classified among expressions related to the path of attaining proximity to God.

**Keywords:** Proximity to God, Semantics, Paradigmatic Relations, Holy Qur'an.

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## Introduction

The Holy Qur'an, the sacred scripture of Muslims, conveys the discourse of revelation, the words of which were divinely revealed to the Prophet of Islam. Each of these words, whether individually or in combination with others, carries specific semantic loads. The word *Qurb* is one of the fundamental, multidimensional terms in the Qur'anic text, employed at various levels of the relationship between human beings and God, as well as in interpersonal and social relations. To achieve a precise understanding of this term and its surrounding conceptual network, systematic, theory-driven studies are required—studies that are both academically rigorous and free from uncritical reliance on unverified presuppositions or the repetitive reproduction of inherited interpretations.

Semantics is one of the most important branches of linguistics, defined as the scientific study of meaning in human languages and of the relationship between words and meaning. It plays a significant role in understanding Qur'anic vocabulary. Focusing on the word *Qurb*, this study asks: 'Through which lexical items and structures is the meaning of proximity to God expressed in the Qur'an, and what meaning it assumes within the Qur'anic context?'

Using a descriptive–analytical method, this study first collects and describes the Qur'anic data. It then analyzes the conceptual relations and semantic developments of the word *Qurb* using semantic tools. The corpus examined includes all verses containing the root (*q r b*) and its direct derivatives (e.g., *Aqrab*, *Qarīb*, *Qurbān*, *Qurubāt*, and related forms). In addition, words that function, from a conceptual and functional perspective, as substitutes or co-occurring terms with *Qurb* (such as *Dunuww*, *Ḥaḍar*, *Walī*, *Zulfā*, and *Muḥīṭ*) were identified and catalogued. The principal criterion for selection was the relationship of these lexical forms to the semantic network of "proximity to God" and their occurrence in meaningful Qur'anic contexts. In other words, the samples were chosen based on their representation of semantic diversity, contextual distribution, and the possibility of testing paradigmatic and collocation relations.

After collecting the selected verses, analyses were conducted according to descriptive semantic principles, including the examination of lexical and conceptual collocations, the study of possible paradigmatic within context, the reconstruction of the semantic development of the term in the Qur'anic text, and the extraction of its multiple semantic dimensions.

The present study aims to identify and systematize the vocabulary related to *Qurb* and to explain the process of semantic expansion of this term within the framework of paradigmatic relations. Through precise textual analysis, this research seeks to portray the range of meanings and applications of *Qurb*, reveal subtle semantic distinctions, and clarify the semantic–cultural load of the term within the Qur'anic discourse.

Researchers in various Islamic and interdisciplinary fields have addressed the topic of proximity to God. Among them are the studies by Esmail Alikhani, entitled "Anthropological Foundations of Proximity to God in Islam and Christianity" (2016 AD/1395 SH) and "Theological Foundations of Proximity to God in Islam and Christianity" (2018 AD/1397 SH), which explore the theoretical and comparative foundations of this concept in Islam and Christianity. In the field of Qur'anic semantics, the research by Fatemeh Ghorbani Laktarashani, Zeynab Hosseini, and Ahad Faramarz Gharamaleki (2020 AD/1399 SH),

entitled "Discontinuity or Continuity between God and Human: A Semantic Analysis of the Texts of "Proximity" in the Holy Qur'an," as well as another study titled "A Semantic Analysis of *Qarīb* in the Qur'an with a Collocational and Paradigmatically Approach to Divine Attributes," may be noted.

However, these studies appear to focus primarily on the divine attribute *Qarīb* rather than on a comprehensive semantic analysis of the word *Qurb* within the broader semantic context of the Qur'an. Consequently, research in this area remains limited and fragmented, and the need for more precise analyses remains strong. A general review of the literature reveals the weakness of systematic research on the paradigmatic relations of the word *Qurb*. That is, there remains a notable gap regarding comprehensive studies grounded in contemporary semantic frameworks that examine the possibility of lexical paradigmatic within Qur'anic contexts. Most previous studies have been confined to collecting and describing Qur'anic instances of *Qurb* and its derivatives, with little attempt to reconstruct the semantic network based on possible paradigmatic and collocational analyses. By contrast, the present study is situated within the framework of contemporary semantics and focuses specifically on the paradigmatic relations of the word *Qurb* in the Holy Qur'an. Its central research question is: What are the semantic uses of the word *Qurb*, and 'How is its structure of paradigmatic relations formed in Qur'anic texts?'

### 1. Theoretical Foundations of Paradigmatic Relations

A comprehensive analysis of *Qurb* and its related lexical network necessitates a semantic investigation of "Proximity to God" and its paradigmatic relations. Semantics is a major branch of linguistics, defined as the scientific study of meaning and the relationship between words and meaning. The discipline focuses on the relationship between signifiers such as words, phrases, symbols, and signs (Qaemini, 2020 AD/1399 SH: 1, 14), aiding in determining the meanings of Qur'anic vocabulary.

Clarifying these semantic dimensions not only contributes to a more precise understanding of religious concepts but also provides the analytical tools to explicate the Qur'anic discourse and to extract its communicative intentions. Accordingly, semantics is defined as the scientific study of meaning, or the transmission of meaning, as well as the description of linguistic phenomena within a system, without presuppositions (Safavi, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 34).

Engaging with the foundational issues of Qur'anic semantics (sometimes referred to as its "Principles") without explicitly specifying the theoretical foundations, definitions, and methodology often leads research toward the uncritical acceptance of inherited lexical presuppositions or conventional exegetical interpretations, which may lack strong evidential support and remain subject to dispute. To avoid conceptual confusion and unreliable interpretations, it is essential to clarify and justify the theoretical and methodological positions before undertaking specific analyses.

The present study falls within the domain of linguistic semantics, a branch of contemporary linguistics that examines the transformation of word meanings in discourse through paradigmatic and collocation relations. What is referred to here as "Qur'anic

semantics" generally denotes the application of semantic methods to the conceptual analysis of Qur'anic lexical data. This approach is based on the assumption that semantics represents the psychological dimension of textual understanding, while the Qur'an itself provides the material dimension of linguistic resources (Izutsu, 1982 AD/1361 SH: 4).

Therefore, Qur'anic semantics constitutes a combination of the theoretical analysis of meaning and the application of semantic methods to Qur'anic lexical data, with primary scholarly emphasis placed on the methodological and conceptual dimensions of semantic analysis. By focusing on the ways in which the propositional environment and the lexical neighborhood within the text influence meaning, semantics makes it possible to represent the conceptual networks of a given word. From this perspective, analyzing *Qurb* with attention to paradigmatic relations provides an effective means of uncovering its various semantic dimensions and, through this method, avoiding subservience to unverified presuppositions or the mechanical repetition of inherited exegetical interpretations.

## 2. Paradigmatic Relations

Two fundamental processes are involved in the formation of a sentence: "First, selection that is, choosing a unit from among the members of a given grammatical category; and second, ordering, that is, arranging the selected units in a linear sequence of speech. Accordingly, language operates along two axes: "the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic."

A paradigmatic relation refers to the relationship of each component of a message with other members of the same grammatical category that can replace it and thereby alter the meaning of the sentence (Bagheri, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 69–70). In the systematic study of language, the relationship between the elements present in the message and the absent elements of the same category is called a paradigmatic relation. Thus, in any position on the syntagmatic axis that is assigned to a specific grammatical category, any member of that category can potentially occupy that position and generate multiple sentences without disrupting the formal structure of the sentence. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as equivalence, contrast, or opposition (ibid: 71–73).

In analyzing the discourse of revelation, it becomes evident that the arrangement of lexical items in Qur'anic verses simultaneously embodies both syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimensions. Although each word possesses distinctive features, by virtue of its position and influential role it may function as a substitute or be open to paradigmatic; thus, each word acquires semantic "Force" and "Dynamic movement" through its relationship with other units (Azimah, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 18). On this basis, Qur'anic vocabulary plays a central role in the expansion and deepening of meaning. Moreover, a precise understanding of the position and substitutability of words is a necessary condition for accessing the semantic intentions of the revealed text. Neglect of these structures deprives the researcher of the opportunity to discover the deeper layers of meaning. Indeed, paradigmatic relations constitute not only a theoretical tool for analyzing the lexical system of language but also, in Qur'anic semantic studies, a vital mechanism for producing diverse meanings and for semantic shifts among components. Careful analysis of lexical paradigmatic can thus significantly expand understanding and elucidate the hidden semantic layers of Qur'anic verses.

### 3. Lexical Study of *Qurb*

Lexicographers are in agreement that the basic meaning of *Qurb* is "Nearness" or "Proximity"; however, the semantic range of this word is determined and developed on the basis of its particular uses within syntactic structures and its adjacency to other lexical units in the text. In the Holy Qur'an, both nominal and verbal forms of this root are employed, and each generates distinct semantic nuances depending on sentence context and lexical collocations. Accordingly, this study first addresses the lexical concept of *Qurb* and then examines its usages in Qur'anic texts from a semantic perspective.

#### 3.1. The Lexical Concept of *Qurb*

*Qurb* (*qāf-rā'-bā'*) is derived from the verb *Qaruba-Yaqrubu* and in Arabic denotes "Nearness" or "Proximity." Lexicographers have regarded this root as reflecting the opposition between *Qurb* (proximity) and *Bu'd* (distance), and have noted that its general usage encompasses a range of material, spiritual, and notional categories (Ibn Fāris, 1978 AD/1399 AH: 5: 80; Farāhīdī, 1990 AD/1410 AH: 5, 153; Azharī, 2000 AD/2000 AD/1421 AH: 9, 109; Ibn Sīdah, 2000 AD/2000 AD/1421 AH: 6, 388). For example, *al-Qurbān* denotes an act or object offered for the purpose of attaining divine proximity (Ibn 'Abbād, 1994 AD/1414 AH: 5, 405).

Some lexicographical reports clarify the morphological and functional forms of the word: "*Qarubtu minhu Aqrubu wa Qarrabtuhu Uqarribuhu Qurban wa Qurbānan; Qaruba al-Shay', bi Damm al-Rā', Yaqrubu Qurban wa Qurbānan wa Qirbānan ay Danā* (the thing became near); and in syntactic usage, the singular, dual, and plural forms are treated as sharing the same meaning (Ibn Manzūr, 1994 AD/1414 AH: 1, 662; Zabīdī, 1994 AD/1414 AH: 2, 306).

#### 3.2. Usages of the Word *Qurb* in the Qur'an

Entering a new discursive space and offering original insights into semantic analysis requires, after becoming familiar with the lexical meaning of *Qurb*, an investigation of its usages to understand meaning reception and identify semantic relations among Qur'anic words. Through the morphological development of the root (*q r b*), various derivatives have emerged which, in Qur'anic contexts, assume specific meanings. According to 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Qurb* is fundamentally a relational concept by which bodies are described in terms of spatial proximity (e.g., one thing is near to us while another is distant), but its usage has been extended to temporal and non-temporal domains as well (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1998 AD/1996 AD/1417 AH: 19, 207). Explicitly, some lexicographers have identified different types of *Qurb*, such as spatial proximity, temporal proximity, kinship-based proximity, proximity in rank and status, protective proximity, proximity of power, and other forms (Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1992 AD/1412 AH: 663–664; Ibn Fāris, 1978 AD/1399 AH: 1, 662). Accordingly, in order to attain a deeper understanding of the word *Qurb* in its various applications, the multiple meanings of this word will be examined within the conceptual relations of selected Qur'anic verses.

##### 1) Spatial Proximity

In its semantic structure, the word *Qurb* is sometimes used to mean spatial proximity.

Examples include the prohibition addressed to Adam and Eve concerning the forbidden tree:

"Do not approach this tree," (al-Baqarah: 35) the prohibition against approaching the property of orphans: "Do not approach the property of the orphan," (al-An'ām: 152) and the emphatic prohibition of adultery because of the ugliness of the act: "Do not approach adultery; indeed, it is an abomination and an evil way." (al-Isrā': 32)

In this verse, in addition to prohibiting the act of adultery and strongly emphasizing its unlawfulness, God forbids even approaching the setting that leads to it, giving as the rationale the obscene nature of the act itself. This ugliness is an inseparable attribute of the act under all circumstances. The verse continues: "And it is an evil way," meaning a corrupt method that leads to the corruption of all social affairs, thoroughly disrupting the family and social system and threatening the very foundation of human life (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 13, 85–86).

In the verse

"So let them not approach *al-Masjid al-Ḥarām* after this year." (al-Tawbah: 28) The impurity of the polytheists prevents their proximity to the Sacred Mosque. Likewise, in the verse: "And do not approach them [your wives] until they are purified," (al-Baqarah: 222) approach is used as a euphemism for sexual intercourse, prohibiting intimacy during menstruation (Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1992 AD/1412 AH: 663).

The intended meaning of spatial proximity in the verse: "Do not approach this tree, lest you become among the wrongdoers," (al-Baqarah: 35) is both avoiding physical nearness to the tree and the prohibition of eating from it, as inferred from the contextual and intertextual indication in the verse: "So they both ate from it, and their nakedness became apparent to them" (Ṭāḥā: 121) (Qarashī, 1951 AD/1371 AH: 5, 293). The expression "Do not approach" is more emphatic than "Do not eat," because approaching something naturally generates desire and inclination toward it (Ibn 'Āshūr, n.d.: 1, 417).

Similarly, in the verse "Do not approach the property of the orphan." (al-An'ām: 152) The expression "Do not approach" signifies strict avoidance of certain sins. This warning is particularly directed at tempting sins such as adultery, indecency, and the consumption of orphans' property, so that people may not even come near them and fall prey to powerful temptations (Shariatmadari, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 3, 607).

## 2) Temporal Proximity

Another application of this word appears in the sense of temporal proximity, as is clearly evident in the verses: "The reckoning of mankind has drawn near," (al-Anbiyā': 1) and "And I do not know whether what you are promised is near or far" (al-Anbiyā': 109) (Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1992 AD/1412 AH: 663).

The word *Iqtirāb* in the first verse, derived from the form *Ifti'āl*, signifies "Nearing" but is more rhetorically forceful than the simple form *Qurb*. This semantic intensification arises from the increased number of letters in the morphological structure, which conveys greater emphasis on nearness (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 14, 342).

Temporal proximity in the sense of the imminent occurrence of an event is also reflected in the verse: "They say: "When will it be?" Say: "Perhaps it is near." (al-Isrā': 51) Here,

"Near" in fact signifies "In a near time," where the noun time is omitted and replaced by its qualifying adjective (*Qarīban*) (Ālūsī, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 8, 89).

### 3) Kinship-Based Proximity

By surveying the verses of the Holy Qur'an, another semantic application of the word *Qurb* can be identified: kinship-based proximity, referring to familial and social relations. For example, in the verse: "And when We took the covenant from the Children of Israel: "You shall worship none but Allah, and show kindness to parents and to relatives, orphans, and the needy." (al-Baqarah: 83)

In Qur'anic discourse, kinship-based proximity is expressed through *Qarābah* and *Qurbā* (Qarashī, 1957 AD/1377 AH: 1, 178). In fact, *al-Qarābah* and *Qurbā* denote blood relations and genealogical kinship, as in the expression: "*Baynī wa Baynahu Qarābah*" (there is kinship between me and him) (Jawharī, 1984 AD/1404 AH: 1, 199).

It should be noted that Arabs distinguish between *Qarīb* in the sense of kinship (a relative) and *Qarīb* in the spatial sense, saying: "*Hādhihi Qarībatī min al-Nasab, wa Hādihā Qarībī min al-Makān*" (this is my relative by lineage, and this is my neighbor in location) (Ibn Manzūr, 1994 AD/1414 AH: 1, 663). A more precise examination of Qur'anic verses shows further manifestations of this meaning, including relationships based on social cooperation:

"He said: Yes, and indeed you will then be among the close ones" (al-A'rāf: 114; al-Shu'arā': 42); proximity based on lineage: "For parents and close relatives" (al-Nisā': 7); and "And the near neighbor," (al-Nisā': 36) which are among other instances of this semantic category.

### 4) Proximity of Rank and Status

Among the other applications of the word *Qurb* is its use in the sense of proximity in rank, status, and position, which is most often applied to servants of God at the stage of servitude and worship. This is exemplified in the noble verse:

"Honored in this world and the Hereafter and among those brought near [to God]." (Āli 'Imrān: 45)

It is evident that a servant's proximity to God is an acquired state that is attained through worship and acts of devotion. For this meaning, the word *Taqarrub* (seeking nearness) is employed, that is, striving to draw near to something or someone. Through righteous deeds, the servant draws near to God, the result of which is exposure to divine mercy and distance from the factors of wretchedness and deprivation (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 19, 207).

On this basis, *Qarīb* is considered an attribute of divine action. God's nearness to created beings, as expressed in verses such as: "Indeed, I am near; I respond to the supplication of the supplicant when he calls upon Me," (al-Baqarah: 186) does not signify spatial distance, since nearness and remoteness are relative concepts and belong to the properties of bodies. Therefore, divine proximity signifies ontological encompassing and all-encompassing presence (Hosseini Hamadani, 2005 AD/1404 AH: 2, 123). In other words, because of the encompassing nature of God's presence over human beings, He is nearer to them than anything else: "And We are closer to him than his jugular vein." (Qāf: 16).

The Noble Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family), in explanation of

this verse, stated:

"Praise be to God who is exalted and transcendent in the heavens and near and present on earth, and nearer to us than the artery of the heart." (Majlisī, 2004 AD/1403 AH: 88, 332)

It is thus evident that the relationship between God and human beings is not confined to time and space. According to some exegetes, the intended meaning of the above verse is God's nearness in knowledge and awareness, since God is not spatially localized. The mention of the jugular vein is due to the fact that it is from there that life is sustained in the human being, whose humanity resides in the brain and the heart (Husseini Shirazi, 2003 AD/1424 AH: 5, 219).

With simple, accessible language, the verse expresses God's nearness to humanity. In reality, however, this matter is extremely subtle and profound, for God is the creator of the human soul and its effects, and at the same time the intermediary between the soul and its actions. God, in every respect, even more than the human being to himself, is near to the human being. Since this meaning is precise and difficult for general comprehension, the Qur'an limits itself to this level of explanation (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 18, 520).

What can be derived from Qur'anic teachings is that all existence is in motion toward God. That is, all beings undergo a process of becoming toward God, which is referred to as *Taqarrub ilā Allāh* (drawing near to God). Every being, in proportion to its ontological capacity, attains proximity to God and encounters Him. For this reason, divine proximity represents the highest goal of the path of human perfection, for which metaphysical and spiritual foundations and requisites have been articulated in Transcendent Philosophy and Islamic mysticism (Javar Shakkiyan et al., 2023 AD/1402 SH: 101).

### 5) Preferential Proximity

Preferential proximity refers to nearness or priority of one category over another. When something is described as "Close in terms of preference," it means that, in comparison with other matters, it possesses greater precedence or significance. In essence, preferential proximity represents a form of prioritization based on factors such as degree of closeness, level of importance, or ease of realization. This meaning of *Qurb* can be observed in verses such as:

"Indeed, I am near; I respond to the supplication of the supplicant," (al-Baqarah: 186) and "Indeed, the mercy of God is near to the doers of good." (al-A'rāf: 56)

In the verse: "Indeed, I am near; I respond to the supplication of the supplicant," (al-Baqarah: 186) The most eloquent style and the most delicate meaning concerning supplication and the nearness of God to His servants are expressed through seven rhetorical dimensions, all of which indicate God's special attention to the acceptance of supplications:

1. The verse is constructed in the first-person singular, not in the third person, indicating special divine concern.
2. The term "My servants" is used instead of "people," conveying greater intimacy and affection.
3. God states without intermediary: "When My servants ask you about Me, indeed I am near."
4. The statement "Indeed, I am near" is emphasized with *Inna*, indicating certainty and

firmness.

5. Nearness is expressed through an adjective rather than a verb, indicating permanence and stability.

6. The use of the present tense in the promise of response signifies continuity and renewal of divine response.

7. Finally, the promise of response is conditioned with "When he calls upon Me," demonstrating that supplication is answered without restriction, just as in the verse:

"Call upon Me; I will answer you" (Ghāfir: 60) (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 2, 30–31).

It must be noted that perfection and divine proximity are real and objective realities. Entities do not undergo perfection in terms of their quiddity, but rather in terms of their existence; they acquire proximity and perfection. Thus, the principle of perfection flows within the very reality of existence. However, perfection cannot appear at the highest ontological level, because the supreme degree of existence is that beyond which no greater can be conceived, namely, the Necessary Being, into whom no non-existence can penetrate, who is self-subsistent and independent of all else, and beyond whom no greater perfection can be conceived (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, 1981: 6, 24).

#### 6) Proximity of Accessibility

The meaning of *Qurb* as accessibility is found exclusively in the verse:

"Had it been an immediate gain and an easy journey, they would have followed you..." (al-Tawbah: 42)

The word *Qarīban* here is a simple trilateral adjective derived from the root (*q r b*). In his exegesis, *Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī* explains that the word *'Araḍ* refers to something that is quick to perish and vanish. In the Qur'an, it is used to refer to worldly wealth. The intended meaning of "Nearness" in the verse is that the wealth is immediate and readily accessible. The expression *Safaran Qāṣidan*, given that *Qaṣd* implies moderation and ease, refers to a journey that is neither long nor arduous, but rather easy and near (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 9, 284).

In addition to the above cases, other applications also appear in the Qur'an, indicating further types of proximity, such as proximity in the sense of prohibition of an act:

"Do not approach them until they are purified," (al-Baqarah: 222) and the act of offering a sacrifice: "Until he brings us an offering which the fire consumes," (Āli 'Imrān: 183) which, due to brevity, have not been examined here.

#### 4. A Semantic Analysis of "Proximity to God"

Proximity to God is a form of spiritual and immaterial nearness, which the human being attains in his practical spiritual journey through the intention of seeking closeness to God. This type of proximity does not belong to the category of material, physical, bodily, or temporal proximity (Javadi Amoli, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 4, 30). Since the central axis of the present research is proximity to God, in order to examine the semantic substitutes of this term within this discourse, attention must be directed toward those words which, in the Qur'anic context, carry a meaning similar or closely related to "Proximity to God."

#### 4.1. Direct Substitutes of "Proximity to God" Based on the Root

In this section, words derived from the root (*q r b*) in different morphological structures are examined, from which the direct semantic substitutes of "Proximity to God" can be inferred:

##### 4.1.1. *Aqrab*

Derived from the root *Qurb* in the simple trilateral form (*Qaruba–Yaqrubu*), *Aqrab* appears as a comparative adjective (*noun of al-Taḥḍīl*) in nine Qur'anic verses, indicating stability and continuity of a state. In the verse:

"Indeed, We created man, and We know what his soul whispers to him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein," (Qāf: 16) God's proximity to the human being is expressed after referring to His all-encompassing knowledge of creation. Being "nearer than the jugular vein" is, in reality, a metaphor and simile for spiritual proximity, expressed through a sensible and perceptible image (Ibn 'Arabī, 2001 AD/1422 AH: 2, 278).

The verse refers not only to the initial creation of the human being but also to the gradual ontological development and transformation of his existence. Since the human being, after his initial creation, continues to depend upon divine bestowal for his continued existence, this noble verse indicates the permanence and continuity of human existence in the sense that as long as human existence persists, God is fully aware of his innermost thoughts and is constantly nearer to him than his jugular vein (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 18, 346).

Some exegetes have interpreted this nearness as God's knowledge of the human being (Ṭabarsī, 1952 AD/1372 AH: 9, 216), while others have regarded it as a metaphorical expression of proximity (Fayḍ Kāshānī, 1998 AD/1418 AH: 5, 60).

Moreover, God's nearness to the human being in this verse is among those realities that are not easily comprehensible to the general public. For a clearer understanding, God states in another verse:

"Know that God intervenes between a man and his heart," (al-Anfāl: 24) meaning that God stands as an intermediary between the human being and his heart (Ṭabarsī, 1952 AD/1372 AH: 9, 347). According to some commentators, the phrase "We are nearer to him" is metaphorical, meaning that God's knowledge is so close to the human being that none of his secrets is hidden from Him. It is as though His very essence is present with the human being, just as it is said that God is present everywhere, transcending all places. The jugular vein thus serves as a metaphor for extreme closeness (Zamakhsharī, 1987 AD/1407 AH: 4, 383).

##### 4.1.2. *Qarīb*

The plural of *Qarīb* is *Aqārib*, and it is derived from the root *Qurb*, meaning "Near." Its feminine form is *Qarībah*, and its plural is *Qarā'ib* (Farāhīdī, 1990 AD/1410 AH: 5, 154). This word collocates with *Samī'* in the verse:

"Indeed, He is All-Hearing, near," (Saba': 50) and with *Mujīb* in the verse: "Indeed, my Lord is near and Responsive." (Hūd: 61)

Furthermore, the word *'Alīm*, which is syntactically one of the collocates of *Samī'*, with 32 occurrences, and the word *Baṣīr*, another collocate of *Samī'* with 12 occurrences, may also fulfill the necessary conditions for substituting the attribute *Qarīb*.

*Qarīb* appears three times in the Qur'an as one of the Most Beautiful Names of God: "Indeed, I am near" (al-Baqarah: 186); "Indeed, my Lord is near and Responsive" (Hūd: 61); "Indeed, He is All-Hearing, near." (Saba': 50)

In addition, in verses such as:

"Indeed, the help of God is near" (al-Baqarah: 214); "Then they repent shortly thereafter" (al-Nisā': 17); "Indeed, the mercy of God is near to the doers of good" (al-A'rāf: 56); "And they were seized from a nearby place," (Saba': 51) and similar verses, *Qarīb* is used in the senses of temporal, spatial, and preferential proximity.

When servants ask God the Exalted about His position in relation to them, God employs the attribute "*Qarīb*" in order to express His nearness to His servants at all times and in all places, and to affirm His role as the One who answers supplications under all circumstances. Thus, He declares:

"And when My servants ask you about Me, indeed I am near; I answer the supplication of the supplicant when he calls upon Me." (al-Baqarah: 186)

An examination of this verse reveals several key points: First, the nearness of God signifies His constant companionship, as stated elsewhere:

"And He is with you wherever you may be." (al-Ḥadīd: 4)

Second, His companionship with things does not imply mixture or physical interpenetration, nor does His separation from them imply estrangement. Likewise, His nearness does not signify spatial contact, nor does His distance imply physical separation; rather, it is of an entirely different order (Fayḍ Kāshānī, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 1, 223).

Third, the phrase "Indeed, I am near" in this verse encompasses God's nearness in terms of knowledge and response; it is a figurative expression of the perfection of His knowledge of the actions, words, and states of His servants (Kāshānī, 1957 AD/1336 AH: 1, 397).

Fourth, the verse is structured in a hope-inspiring framework of supplication, since the phrase "I answer the supplication of the supplicant when he calls upon Me" affirms divine proximity and constitutes a promise of answered prayer to the petitioner (Fayḍ Kāshānī, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 1, 89).

Accordingly, one of the most significant implications in the semantic analysis of the term *Qarīb* is the negation of any form of distance or separation between God and His creation, and the complete rejection of the need for intermediaries such as idols in the relationship of proximity between God and humankind (Subḥānī, n.d.: 1, 424).

The nearness of God is described in the verses:

"So seek forgiveness from Him, then repent to Him. Indeed, my Lord is near and Responsive" (Hūd 11:61), "Indeed, He is All-Hearing, Near," (Saba': 50) is likewise a spiritual and metaphysical nearness, not a temporal or spatial one, similar to His all-encompassing nature:

"Indeed, He encompasses all things," (Fuṣṣilat: 54) "And God encompasses what they do," (al-Anfāl: 47) for encompassment necessarily entails proximity to all things.

### 4.1.3. Qurubāt

This word—with the *Ḍamma* on both *Qāf* and *Rā'*—is the plural of *Qurbah*, and functions as

a non-verbal collective noun derived from the trilateral root (*q r b*), used in the sense of nearness. In the verse:

"And among them are those who consider what they spend as a means of nearness (*Qurubāt*) to God and [a means of attaining] the prayers of the Messenger. Truly, it is a means of nearness for them," (al-Tawbah: 99) *Qurubāt* and *Qurbah* are employed with the explicit meaning of seeking proximity to God; that is, they regard their charitable spending as a means of drawing closer to Him. The plural form reflects the multiplicity of acts of spending, each of which increases nearness to God.

In light of the verse: "They seek a means of access to their Lord, striving as to which of them is closest," (al-Isrā': 57) the term *Qurbah* functions metaphorically to denote divine pleasure and the elevation of spiritual ranks in Paradise (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1984: 11, 15). It also denotes physical nearness in a different sense. Moreover, the Bedouins who believed in God and the Last Day gave charity with the intention of drawing near to God and through the supplication of the Messenger (Amin, 1982 AD/1361 SH: 6, 94).

#### 4.1.4. Qurbā

This is a trilateral, non-patterned verbal noun—such as *Ruj'ā* and *Bushrā*—meaning nearness and kinship, and is used in the Qur'an to denote relatives by blood or marriage (Ibn Sīdah, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 6, 389). The term appears four times without the definite article and twelve times with the definite article in multiple syntactic forms, all carrying this semantic function.

In the verse: "...know that whatever spoils you acquire, one-fifth belongs to God, the Messenger, and the near relatives (*al-Qurbā*)...", (al-Anfāl: 41) *al-Qurbā* denotes those in the closest degree of kinship to the Prophet. Since almsgiving was prohibited for them, the establishment of a financial right for them from the wealth of God constitutes an act of divine honor toward the Prophet and his family (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1984: 10, 9).

#### 4.1.5. Qurbān

According to the expression "*Qaruba minhu Qurbānan*," the term originally functions as a verbal noun meaning "To draw near," but it is also used as a noun referring to any righteous act by which a servant seeks nearness to God (Farāhīdī, 1989 AD/1410 AH: 5, 153; Ibn Manzūr, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 1, 665; Ibn Durayd, 1987: 1, 325). It appears three times in the Qur'an:

A) 'Why did the gods they took besides God as a means of nearness not support them?' (al-Aḥqāf: 28) Here, *Qurbānan* is a verbal noun in the accusative of purpose, indicating the act of seeking proximity through idols. The verse is rhetorically ironic, exposing the futility of their worship (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 18, 325–326; Zamakhsharī, 1986 AD/1407 AH: 4, 310).

B) Those who said: "God has taken a covenant from us that we should not believe in a messenger unless he brings us a sacrifice (*Qurbān*) which fire consumes." (Āli 'Imrān: 183)

C) "And recite to them the story of the two sons of Adam in truth, when they both offered a sacrifice (*Qurbān*)..." (al-Mā'idah: 27) Here, *Qurbān* functions as an instrumental noun rather than a verbal noun. The verb *Taqabbul* (acceptance) in the verse denotes not merely

acceptance, but acceptance accompanied by special divine favor and care (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 5, 298).

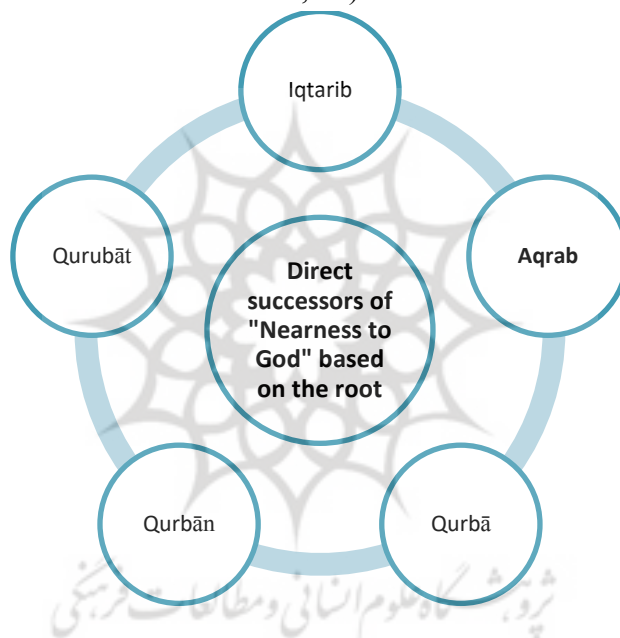
#### 4.1.6. Iqtarib

The verb *Iqtaraba* (to draw near) represents another semantic dimension of the root (*q r b*) in the Qur'an, where it often conveys temporal proximity. Morphologically, it belongs to the *Ifti'āl* pattern, which conveys responsiveness or gradual realization. Although it primarily expresses temporal nearness, it may also indicate rank-based proximity, as in:

"Prostrate and draw near," (al-'Alaq: 19) where it signifies nearness to God through worship (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 20, 327).

In the verse: "The Hour has drawn near, and the moon has split," (al-Qamar: 1)

*Iqtirāb* unmistakably denotes imminent temporal occurrence, indicating that the event is very near (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 19, 55).



## 4.2. Conceptual Substitutes Related to "Nearness to God"

In examining the semantic substitutes for this term in Qur'anic discourse, we encounter words that convey meanings similar to or associated with "Nearness to God," though subtle functional and contextual differences can be observed among them. Some of these verses are discussed below:

### 4.2.1. The Term *Dunuww*

The form *Adnā* is derived from the root (*d n w*), meaning "Closer" or "Nearest." In the verse:

"The Romans have been defeated in the nearest land...", (al-Rūm: 2–3) *Adnā* may function as a superlative adjective indicating the proximity of the Roman defeat to the land of Mecca (Shari'atmadari, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 2, 54–55).

In another verse: "And whomever you take back from those you had set aside, there is no blame upon you; that is more suitable so that their eyes may be comforted...", (al-Aḥzāb: 51) *Adnā* is used in the sense of *Aqrab* (closer), indicating that reconciliation and restoring

closeness are closer to emotional satisfaction (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 16, 336).

This term occurs nine times in the Qur'an. Accordingly, in the verse: "Then he drew near and came down," (al-Najm: 8) the Prophet, despite the loftiness of his rank, is described as drawing ever nearer to God, until the distance became that of two bow-lengths or even less. Here, *Adnā* denotes intense spiritual nearness (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 19, 28).

Some exegetes, deriving the term from *Dalw* (a bucket lowered into a well), understood the verse to imply downward extension. If both pronouns refer to Gabriel, the meaning would be that Gabriel approached the Prophet and drew near to him to accompany him in the Ascension (Ṭabrisī, 1952 AD/1372 AH: 9, 262). Another interpretation holds that Gabriel descended from the highest horizon and approached the Prophet in order to take him on the *Mi'rāj* (Qurtubī, 1965 AD/1385 AH: 17, 85). However, if both pronouns refer to the Prophet himself, the verse indicates that he drew nearer to God and intensified his proximity to God (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 19, 28).

From another philosophical perspective, some movements from potentiality to actuality culminate in the human being, composed of body and soul, undertaking an arduous ascent toward divine encounter. By transcending lower corporeal realms and attaining the station of divine proximity, the human being reaches the level indicated by "Then he drew near and came down." (al-Najm: 8) This blessed migration is considered among the highest forms of motion toward perfection (Javadi Amoli, 2013 AD/1393 SH: 13, 146).

#### 4.2.2. The Term *Walī*

The term *Walī* is among the most frequently used Qur'anic words in the semantic development of the concept of "Nearness to God." The root (*w l y*) fundamentally means "Proximity," (Ṭayyib, 1958 AD/1378 AH: 3, 22) and *Walī* signifies nearness and non-separation; hence, it is applied to a guardian, caretaker, and guide (Makarem Shirazi, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 2, 264).

Due to its structural flexibility and contextual adaptability, this word takes on multiple semantic dimensions in the Qur'an through its co-textual associations. Based on contextual use, *Walī* conveys at least ten meanings, including: "Son," (Maryam: 5) "Lord," (al-An'ām: 14; al-A'rāf: 3; al-Shūrā: 3) "Deity," (al-Jāthīyah: 10; al-Shūrā: 6) "Friend and supporter," (al-Baqarah: 257; al-Mā'idah: 51, 55; al-Mujādilah: 14) "Freed Slave," (al-Aḥzāb: 5) "Non-relative allies," (al-Isrā': 111; al-Kahf: 17) "Close relatives," (al-Dukhān: 41; al-'Ankabūt: 22) "Household and kin," (Maryam: 5) and "Trusted confidants for consultation." (al-Nisā': 144) All of these derived meanings remain closely connected to the core semantic nucleus of proximity and absence of separation (Noresideh, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 167).

In relation to God, *Walī* most often denotes divine guardianship and patronage, signifying God's existential nearness and protective support for human beings. The expression *Walī Allāh* appears three times in the Qur'an, always in direct collocation with the Divine Name *Allāh*. For example:

"God is the Guardian of those who believe..." (al-Baqarah: 257) indicates a deep, protective bond that surpasses an ordinary Creator–creature relationship and instead points to

existential proximity. Likewise:

"And God is the Guardian of the God-conscious," (al-Jāthīyah: 19) indicates that once a person falls under God's guardianship, divine management fully encompasses their affairs (Javadi Amoli, 2014 AD/1394 SH: Session 8). Similarly:

"And God is the Guardian of the believers," (Āli 'Imrān: 68) expresses God's supportive proximity toward the believers (Fayḍ Kāshānī, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 1, 347).

Some exegetes explain *Walī* in: "God is the Guardian of those who believe; He brings them out of darkness into light..." (al-Baqarah: 257) as meaning an intimate supporter, guardian, and administrator (Taleqani, 1983 AD/1362 SH: 2, 197–208). The verse does not imply redundancy, since believers require divine guidance at every stage of their progression toward God (Makarem Shirazi, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 2, 264).

Thus, *Walī* clearly embodies a form of supportive, relational nearness between God and human beings.

#### 4.2.3. The Term *Zulfā*

The term *Zulfā* signifies *Qurbā* (nearness) (Mughnīyah, 2003 AD/1424 AH: 6, 392). It appears twice in the Qur'an, and in both instances it is coupled with derivatives of (*q r b*):

"...That they may bring us nearer to God in nearness (*Zulfā*)," (al-Zumar: 3) "...Bring you nearer to Us in nearness (*Zulfā*)." (Saba': 37)

In the first verse, *Zulfā* is treated as a nominal substitute for the verbal noun *Qurbā* and functions as an absolute object of *li Yuqarribūnā*, meaning: "Except to draw us nearer to God in nearness." (Sharif Lahiji, 1994 AD/1373 SH: 3, 849)

The verse exposes the erroneous belief that proximity to idols leads to proximity to God. The second verse: "Neither your wealth nor your children will bring you nearer to Us in nearness, except for those who believe and act righteously...", (Saba': 37) establishes that faith and righteous deeds, not wealth or offspring, are the true criteria for nearness to God. Material possessions and social status neither avert punishment nor guarantee salvation; rather, only ethical faith-based action leads to divine proximity (Hosseini Hamadani, 1983 AD/1404 SH: 13, 238). This meaning is further supported by: "The Messiah will never disdain being a servant of God, nor will the angels who are brought near." (al-Nisā': 172)

#### 4.2.4. The Term *Muḥīt*

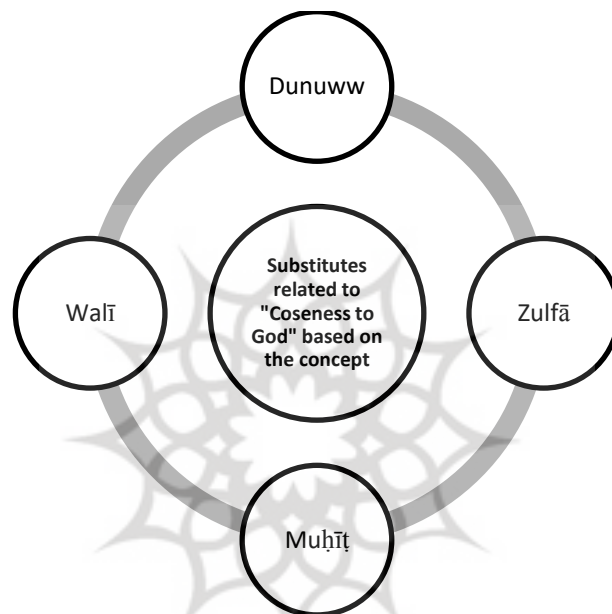
The concept of divine encompassment is another significant dimension of semantic paradigmatic. The term *Muḥīt*, from the root (*h w t*), appears in: "And God encompasses the disbelievers," (al-Baqarah: 19) where it signifies absolute, all-encompassing proximity, such that nothing lies beyond God's existential presence.

God's proximity to human beings is real and ontological, based on existential encompassment, whereas the human being's proximity to God is normative and behavioral, realized through obedience. Nevertheless, this prescriptive nearness prepares the ground for existential ascent in being (Javadi Amoli, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 4, 295).

God reminds His servants of His nearness through various formulations, such as: "Indeed, He is All-Hearing, Near," (Saba': 50) "Indeed, He encompasses all things," (Fuṣṣilat: 54) "And God encompasses what they do." (al-Anfā: 47)

Since encompassment logically entails nearness, *Ṭabrisī* writes regarding the latter verse: "God is fully aware of their deeds, and none of their actions is hidden from Him." (*Ṭabrisī*, 1952 AD/1372 AH: 4, 843)

Likewise, the verse: "If you remain patient and mindful of God, their plotting will not harm you in the least. Indeed, God encompasses what they do," (*Āli 'Imrān*: 120) indicates that patience and God-consciousness are the two essential pillars in resisting the plots of enemies. Since God fully encompasses all actions, intentions, and schemes, no conspiracy can ultimately harm the believers (*Amin*, 1982 AD/1361 SH: 3, 236). Accordingly, this verse also points to God's constant and uninterrupted nearness.



## Conclusion

Through a semantic analysis of the term "Nearness to God" based on paradigmatically relations in order to understand its conceptual meaning and semantic network in the Holy Qur'an, the following results were obtained:

1. The term *Qurb* in the Holy Qur'an, when analyzed within its semantic structure and in relation to other linguistic structures, possesses both direct and indirect semantic substitutes.
2. Its direct substitutes include linguistic structures such as *Aqrab*, *Qarīb*, *Qurbān*, and *Qurubāt*, all of which are used in the context of drawing near to God. Meanwhile, other structures, such as *Qurbā* and *Iqtaraba*, are also employed in the sense of nearness, but sometimes in relation to something other than God.
3. The examination of paradigmatically relations associated with the concept of nearness to God shows that:
  - The term *Dunuww* refers to closeness to God;
  - The term *Walī*, which appears ten times in the Qur'an, is deeply associated with the meaning of nearness and inseparability;
  - The word *Azafa* is used in reference to the nearness of the occurrence of the Day of Resurrection;

- The root *Zulfā* conveys the meanings of rank, station, and spiritual position;
  - Finally, the term *Muḥīt* expresses the notion of spiritual nearness and existential encompassment;
4. The study also revealed that some Qur'anic terms can be placed indirectly within the paradigmatically network of "Nearness to God," as they contribute conceptually to the broader meaning of proximity and divine closeness.
5. Since the present semantic analysis was conducted with a focus on nearness to God, it is recommended that other spiritual and immaterial realities of the unseen world, such as the realm of angels and topics related to the Resurrection, Paradise, and Hell, should likewise be examined in the verses of the Holy Qur'an using semantic analysis based on paradigmatically and syntagmatic relations.

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