

[Home](#) > [Self-Recognition for Self-Improvement](#) > [Qurb \(Proximity\) with Allah](#) > The Means of Achieving Qurb with Allah

Qurb (Proximity) with Allah

Qurb (proximity) with Almighty Allah, which is man's ultimate objective and which must be reached with will-power, does not mean bridging the gap of time and place, because Almighty Allah is the creator of time and place and encompasses all times and places and has no relationship in time and place with any being:

﴿هُوَ الْأَوَّلُ وَالْآخِرُ وَالظَّاهِرُ وَالْبَاطِنُ...﴾

"He is the first and the last and the Ascendant (over all) and the knower of hidden things... (57:3)."

«...وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ...»

"... And He is with you wherever You are... (57:4)."

«...فَإَيْنَمَا تَوَلَّوْا فَتَمَّ وَجْهُ اللَّهِ...»

"... Therefore, wherever you turn, there is Allah's face... (2: 115)."

In addition, the spontaneous bridging of time and place is not deemed a perfection. So what is actually meant by this proximity?

«...أَلَا إِنَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ مُّحِيطٌ...»

"... Now surely He encompasses all things (41:54)."

The being and all the existential states of all creatures are within Allah's power and linked to His will-

power. Rather, the existence of everything hinges on connection with and dependence on Him. As a result, He is closer (than aught) to everything:

“...وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ”

"... And We are nearer to him than his life vein (50: 16)."

“قُلُوبًا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ غَيْرَ مَدِينِينَ”

"And We are nearer to it than you, but you do not see (56:85)."

And this is a true existential proximity but it is not acquired. For this purpose, it cannot be regarded as the ultimate point and destination of man's development.

For proximity, one can conceive a meaning which is acquired and which is compatible with man's ultimate perfection. And that is a proximity based on credit and honour. That is to say, man is subjected to Allah's special grace such that all his demands come true:

A servant who reaches such a degree has reached his objective. In common usage too, a person who is loved by an eminent person is called "*muqarrab*". The Holy Qur'an also uses the term *muqarribun* to refer to the forerunners of the path of man's development:

“فِي جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ. أُولَئِكَ الْمُقَرَّبُونَ”

"And the foremost are the foremost, these are the ones who are drawn nigh (to Allah) (56: 10–11).

But here we do not intend to conduct a verbal discussion and to find a suitable meaning for the term *qurb*. The intention is rather to draw greater attention to man's ultimate goal, so that in its light, we would get to know the general path and the main road towards development. We must therefore, focus on the reality lurking beyond this honour and credit.

The reality which is regarded as man's ultimate perfection and which is called the *qurb* of Allah is a phase of being wherein man's innate gifts become active through their own voluntary movement. This movement can be quick and speedy (like that of some messengers and divine guardians who proceeded with development from the very first moment of their lives and who reached great perfection in a very small span of time) as Isa ibn Maryam (AS) said (the following) in the cradle:

“...إِنِّي عَبْدُ اللَّهِ آتَانِيَ الْكِتَابَ وَجَعَلَنِي نَبِيًّا”

"... Surely I am a servant of Allah; He has given me the Book and made me a prophet (19:30)."

According to Shi'ah narrations, the Imams of the Ahlul-Bayt (AS) praised Allah even in the prenatal state and were born bowing down (to Him). And these are the *sadiqun*. Or if the movement is average or slow in speed like that of other believers, it is diametrically opposed to the declining movement and retrogressive trend pursued by the disbelievers and the hypocrites.

The perfection derived from this voluntary trend does not depend on time and place and on material and physical conditions. It is rather related to man's heart and soul, and material conditions have a role only in paving the way for (this) movement, else the body's quantitative and qualitative move or transferring from one place to another have no impact on man's development, except that they assist man's spiritual and moral progress and that they are indirectly effective in man's development.

Thus man's true development consists of a scientific movement within the soul to reach a state where it could see itself dependent on and linked with Him, where it could see no independence in being, features, and deeds for itself and for other creatures, and where no incident would prevent it from making this observation. The sciences and observations acquired by man in the course of this movement will heighten his existential status and will gradually make his essence more perfect.

As a result of this, the less man feels in need of Allah, the more he deems himself independent in managing the affairs and providing the means of living and performing physical and mental activities. And the more independence he considers for other objects, the more ignorant, the more imperfect and the farther away from Allah will he be. The more he sees himself in need of Allah, the more he removes the veils of means, and the more the dark and bright veils are lifted from his eyes, the more aware, the more perfect and closer to Allah will he be, so much so that he will become a monotheist in acts and impacts and will see no independence for traits and beings. This is a state which the deserving and sincere servants and Allah's chosen friends will reach. Then there will remain no veil between them and their Beloved.

Thus true *qurb* with Allah is for man to realize that he would have everything while having Allah's love and satisfaction and that he would have nothing without Allah.

The Means of Achieving Qurb with Allah

All beings in the world of existence are the creatures of Almighty Allah and are dependent on Him in existence and existential states and have no independence whatever:

“ذَلِكُمُ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ...”

"That is Allah, your Lord, the Creator of everything... (40:62)."

”...أَنْتُمْ الْفُقَرَاءُ إِلَى اللَّهِ ۖ وَاللَّهُ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ“

"... You are they one who stand in need of Allah, and Allah is He who is the Self-sufficient the Praised One (35: 15)."

And the reality of their existence is dependence on and attachment to Him, as well as absolute captivity and servitude.

”...كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ...”

"... Every thing is perishable but He... (28:88)."

”...وَعَنَتِ الْوُجُوهُ لِلْحَيِّ الْقَيُّومِ...”

"And the faces shall be humbled before the Living, the Self-subsistent God... (20: 111)."

”إِنْ كُلُّ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ إِلَّا آتِي الرَّحْمَنِ عَبْدًا“

"There is no one in the heavens and the earth but will come to the Beneficent God as a servant (19:93)."

And the acts that they perform are the signs of dependence, servitude and needfulness. Thus ontologically, each person serves Allah:

”...وَلَهُ أُسْلَمَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ...”

"... while to Him submits whoever is in the heavens and the Earth..(3:83)."

”وَلِلَّهِ يَسْجُدُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مِنْ دَابَّةٍ...”

"And whatever creature that is in the heavens and that is in the earth makes obeisance to Allah (only)... (16:49)."

”...وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ...”

"... And there is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise, but you do not understand"

their glorification... (17:44)."

Man is not exempted from this general rule, but normally he is not aware of his ontological servitude. In other words, he has been created in such a way in this world that he regards himself and other objects as being independent:

"Allah created the creatures as ignorants."^{[1](#)}

That is to say, man does not see himself linked with Allah. In like manner, he sees his perfections as emerging from himself and deems himself independent in carrying out various deeds. He sets this independence in existence and in existential signs for other beings as well. He constantly endeavours to expand the sphere of his being and to obtain greater perfections and to find power to carry out more deeds and to make the foundation of his independence stronger. Among his conscious perceptions and desires, there is nothing contradictory to this "imagined independence." Of course he possesses an innate, unconscious perception of his inherent needfulness and his existential dependence, but the dominance of that material and animal aspect precludes this innate perception from reaching awareness except in specific conditions.

After reaching rational development, man can more or less, become aware of his own needfulness through mental activities and rational analysis and can realize the presence of Allah. Gradually with the development of his reason and with expertise in reasoning, he will gain more knowledge about his fundamental needs and his dependence, until in the ultimate phase of his rational progress, he will reach acquired awareness of his dependence. But this mental progress will not bring about an intuitive knowledge by itself. The domination of instincts and feelings and the attraction of desires and sentiments will often leave no room for the appearance and manifestation of innate knowledge, unless man decides to prevent their inundation, so as to reach self-realization, to prepare a means deep within his soul and to initiate a spiritual movement towards *haqq*. That is to say, he should focus on Allah and by continuing and strengthening sincere regards (for Allah), polish his innate knowledge and draw himself close to Allah.

In such a state, man's development in the way of the true destination and innate objective commences. That is to say, with free will and choice, he will make a conscious effort to realize his connection with Allah. He will confess his own need, weakness, meanness and finally his inherent poverty and needfulness. Then he will return to their true Owner the servants of Allah whom he unjustly attributed to himself and to others. And he will return the garb of divine power:

“...إِنَّهُ كَانَ ظَلُومًا جَهُولًا”

"... Surely he is unjust, ignorant (33:72)."

This movement continues till man becomes a sincere servant. As a consequence, man's ultimate

perfection lies in becoming a sincere servant or in seeing one's inherent and complete needfulness. To reach it, one must worship Allah and strive to please Him. That is to say, he should prefer the will of Allah to that of himself:

“إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِ رَبِّهِ الْأَعْلَى”

"Except the seeking of the pleasure of his Lord, the Most High (92:20)."

Thus, the main course of development, the right path of humanity, and the correct way of reaching proximity with Allah is worshipping Him, declaring imagined independence null and void, and confessing one's complete and all-embracing need of Allah:

“وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ”

"And I have not created the jinn and the men except that they should worship Me (51:56)."

“وَأَنْ أَعْبُدُونِي ۚ هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ”

"And that you should worship Me; this is the right way (36:61)."

Only an effort and endeavour which has a hue of the servitude and worship of Allah can be deemed as being directed towards proximity with Allah and towards true development. Nothing other than worshipping Allah could be regarded as leading towards true perfection.

¹. Biharul-Anwar, Vol 3, 15

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