




A Semantic Analysis of Mawaddah and the Islamic Philosophy of Marriage in Surah *Ar-Rum* (30:21)

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 <https://doi.org/10.22081/ttaais.2025.71471.1057>

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 30 March 2024

Revised: 6 May 2024

Accepted: 9 June 2024

Keywords:

Mawaddah,

Philosophy of marriage,

Qur'ān, Semantic evolution.

ABSTRACT

Verse 21 of Surah Ar-Rum states: “And of His signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves so that you may find tranquility in them, and He placed between you affection (*mawaddah*) and mercy. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who reflect”. This verse, which conveys the Qur'ānic philosophy of marriage, notably employs the word *mawaddah* to express affection, a choice that warrants deeper investigation. Analyzing the semantic evolution of key Qur'ānic terms is a valuable and emerging approach in Qur'ānic studies. The vocabulary of the Qur'ān often draws from the lexicon of pre-Islamic Arab culture, including terms common in tribal discourse and poetic expression. Like many such words, *mawaddah* retained its semantic core but underwent significant development in its meaning within the Qur'ānic worldview. This paper explores the semantic trajectory of *mawaddah* and offers a critical analysis of its usage in Surah Ar-Rum, verse 21. It concludes that no other synonymous term would convey the depth and intended meaning as effectively as *mawaddah* in this context.

How to cite this article: Yazdanmehr, E. and Sqab Gandomabadi, M. (2024). A Semantic Analysis of Mawaddah and the Islamic Philosophy of Marriage in Surah Ar-Rum (30:21). *International Journal of Textual and Translation Analysis in Islamic Studies*, 2(3), 334-346. doi: 10.22081/ttaais.2025.71471.1057

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1. Introduction

The purpose of forming and sustaining a family can vary between men and women, who are the primary agents in this process. These purposes may include contributing to a healthy society, ensuring the continuation of the human race, fulfilling basic needs, providing social education for future generations, preserving faith, promoting social cohesion, and fostering growth and development. However, within the framework of the Qur'ān, the purpose of family formation and the philosophy of marriage go beyond these objectives. A thoughtful reflection on Qur'ānic concepts and interpretations offers a powerful means of uncovering profound, latent knowledge for humanity.

Semantics plays a vital role in helping interpreters uncover the deeper meanings embedded in Qur'ānic conceptualizations. It enables a non-reductionist examination of terms in their original form. Given that the Qur'ān is regarded as a divine miracle, its terminology is believed to stem from divine wisdom and is not arbitrary. Thus, Qur'ānic words and expressions must be analyzed as they appear in the sacred text (Ghaeminia, 2011).

Additionally, the semantic evolution of words can shed light on interpretive differences, revealing nuanced layers of meaning through cognitive analysis and broadening the interpreter's perspective. Although many books and scholarly articles address marriage, spousal relationships, and the strengthening of family bonds, there remains a significant gap in research concerning the philosophy of marriage, particularly in relation to the semantic evolution and critical analysis of the term *mawaddah*, a key concept in this domain. This gap underscores the need for further Qur'ānic scholarship to deepen our understanding of marriage's meaning and quality.

In today's mechanized world, where machines increasingly replace human roles, a significant challenge in marital and familial relationships is the inability of couples to effectively express love. A thorough understanding of the semantic range of *mawaddah* within the philosophy of marriage can provide valuable insights. Grasping the true meaning of this term—as a foundational element of spousal relationships, has the potential to inform modern theories of marriage and may help prevent many cases of separation and divorce.

Qur'ānic research necessitates a nuanced and insightful examination of the meanings of verses and surahs, a task that is unachievable without an in-depth analysis of the Qur'ān's vocabulary and the deliberate selection of specific words over others. This approach is supported by empirical studies conducted by religious scholars who argue that uncovering the precise, underlying meanings of Qur'ānic terminology is essential for understanding the divine intent. Given the originality and depth of Qur'ānic language, its words and phrases invite multiple layers of interpretation and translation. This perspective has been emphasized by the most authoritative interpreters of the Qur'ān, namely, the infallible Shiite Imams. In their absence, their true followers are expected to engage directly with the sacred text, reflecting on the significance of key terms and expressions. Such an endeavor, however, cannot be carried out without proper tools. Semantic analysis, a relatively modern discipline that has emerged in the past century, offers a systematic method for examining meaning and achieving a more comprehensive understanding of the Qur'ānic text (Izutsu, 2003).

Semantics has proven particularly effective in exploring the relationships between words and meanings, helping to reveal the rationale behind the Qur'ān's specific lexical choices. In recent years, there has been increasing scholarly interest in applying semantic analysis to the Qur'ānic text. Despite this progress, many significant terms remain underexplored,

among them, the word *mawaddah*. While its denotative meaning refers to love or desire for someone or something, the term holds rich potential for uncovering deeper connotative meanings. In an effort to address this gap in the literature, the present study aims to investigate the lexical evolution of *mawaddah* and its broader semantic implications.

2. This research

To serve the objectives of this study, a semantic analytic framework was employed—an approach that enhances the significance of the research by providing a structured method for uncovering meaning and interpreting texts. In the context of the Holy Qur'ān, semantic analysis is particularly valuable as it enables scholars to explore the underlying intentions and implications of divine revelation. This method investigates the relationships between words and meanings, shedding light on how the deliberate selection of specific terms in the Qur'ānic text reveals distinct semantic layers and theological insights. In recent years, growing attention has been devoted to discussions on the stability of marriage and the factors that may threaten it. From an Islamic perspective, this study's semantic analysis illustrates how the Qur'ān uses the word *mawaddah* to underscore the essential role of affection in sustaining marital life and nurturing the bond between spouses. As such, the findings have meaningful implications for both sociolinguistics and the psychology of marriage. This research further demonstrates how the root of *mawaddah* is intricately linked to the Islamic concept of the marriage contract, reflecting the divine emphasis on emotional connection and mutual affection within this sacred agreement. Therefore, the present paper aims to examine the semantic evolution of the word *mawaddah* (i.e., affection), and analyze the 21st verse of Surah Ar-Rum, which pertains to the philosophy of marriage. Overall, this paper addresses these questions:

RQ1: What is the semantic development of the word *mawaddah*?

RQ2: What is the significance of the word *mawaddah* in Qur'ānic terminology, particularly in the 21st verse of Surah Ar-Rum?

RQ3: What is the significance and relevance of *mawaddah* in relation to the love between spouses, from a Qur'ānic perspective?

3. Literature review

The present study employs semantic analysis and is therefore situated within the broader field of semantics in religious literature. In recent decades, notable contributions have been made in this area, most prominently by the Japanese scholar Izutsu (2002), who applied semantic analysis in his influential works *God and Man in the Qur'ān* and *Ethical-Religious Concepts in the Holy Qur'ān*. In the Iranian context, however, scholarly works on semantics in religious texts, particularly the Holy Qur'ān, remain relatively limited. Notable examples include *Semantic Changes in the Qur'ān* by Seyedi (2015), *An Introduction to Semantics* by Safavi (2004), and *An Introduction to Semantics* by Roshan (2019). While the significance of the Qur'ān is universally acknowledged, there remains a pressing need for deeper investigation into its language—especially the nuanced meanings of its words and phrases. The current body of semantic research is still limited, particularly in terms of historical, descriptive, and cognitive approaches to analyzing the originality and authenticity of Qur'ānic content. This gap underscores the importance and necessity of the present study.

Discussions surrounding the authenticity and originality of the Holy Qur'ān have existed since its revelation to the Prophet. Both intrinsic and extrinsic sources of evidence have been identified to support the originality and divine origin of its content (Waqdan, 2014). Like other studies that conduct semantic analyses of Qur'ānic vocabulary, the present research assumes the Qur'ān's authenticity as a foundational premise. It upholds the belief that the Qur'ānic teachings are entirely original—neither adapted from other sources nor plagiarized. This inherent authenticity is directly linked to a key principle in semantic analysis: the belief in non-synonymy within the Qur'ānic text. According to this view, every word, phrase, and structure in the Qur'ān has been deliberately chosen by God and cannot be substituted without loss of meaning (Yusuf, 2006; Al-Askari, 1974; Hafani, 1970). Therefore, each lexical item in the Qur'ān merits detailed semantic analysis to uncover its historical, descriptive, and cognitive properties—features that justify its use in a specific context and co-text. In recent years, a number of studies have applied semantic analysis to Qur'ānic terms. For instance, Veysi and Gorjian (2023) conducted a componential analysis of the equivalents of Qur'ānic terms; Nasiri et al. (2023) examined lexical consistency in economic verses through textual analysis; and Omidvar et al. (2025) explored the stylistic use of masculine and feminine noun forms in lexically similar verses, uncovering their implicit meanings. Despite these advances, limited research has focused on the social dimensions of Qur'ānic vocabulary—particularly the significance of specific word combinations in fostering and reinforcing family bonds.

To date, no published academic article has specifically examined the content word *mawaddah* in Surah Ar-Rum of the Holy Qur'ān to explore its various semantic layers or its relationship to the concept of marriage and the expression of affection essential for a secure and harmonious marital life. This study seeks to approach *mawaddah* more comprehensively through a semantic lens in order to uncover a deeper and more representative understanding of its meaning and interpretation. Semantic analysis offers a powerful tool for clarifying divergent interpretations of Qur'ānic expressions and for uncovering the subtle nuances embedded in the text. Through cognitive semantic analysis, it is possible to identify limitations in purely literary readings and to expand the interpretive scope of Qur'ānic scholarship (Izutsu, 2002, 2003). Given the notable gap in semantic analysis of *mawaddah* in Surah Ar-Rum—and its potential implications for reinforcing family bonds and emphasizing the value of emotional expression in marital relationships from an Islamic perspective—this study aims to provide a detailed semantic analysis of the term as it appears in the Holy Qur'ān. To achieve this, a qualitative methodology was adopted, which will be outlined in the following section, with a focus on tracing the lexical evolution of the word *mawaddah*.

4. Methodology

The present study employed a qualitative research approach, utilizing a descriptive-analytic design to investigate the foundations of semantic knowledge and to extract both the lexical meaning and the broader semantic domain of the concept of *mawaddah* in the Holy Qur'ān. The primary data source throughout the study was the text of the Holy Qur'ān itself. Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously and followed three main steps:

1. Tracing semantic development: To address the first research question, the semantic development of *mawaddah* was traced across three historical phases—prior to the revelation of the Qur'ān, during the time of revelation, and in the immediate post-revelation period among Arab communities.

2. Analyzing contextual significance: The second step focused on examining the specific use of *mawaddah* in verse 21 of Surah Ar-Rum. This involved exploring the syntagmatic relationships of the word within its immediate co-text to uncover its contextual significance.

3. Relating to marital love: The third step sought to explore how *mawaddah* relates to the Qur'ānic view of love and affection between spouses. Specifically, it examined how the term is judiciously employed in the Qur'ānic discourse to emphasize the emotional and spiritual foundations of a successful, loving, and enduring marital relationship. This step addressed the third research question.

The theoretical framework guiding this study is lexical semantics, which focuses on the meaning of words and their combinations. Lexical semantics, as defined by Cooper and Retoré (2017), primarily addresses two areas: the internal semantic structure of individual words and the semantic relationships that exist within a language's lexicon.

5. Results

The present study addressed three research questions and the results are also presented here in three parts, respectively.

5.1. The semantic development of *mawaddah*

The word *mawaddah* existed prior to the revelation of the Qur'ān and appears in various literary texts and poetry from the pre-Islamic era. The root *wadd* “وَدَّ” was used frequently during this period in different morphological forms, with a basic and central meaning associated with love and desire. Before the emergence of Islam, this root was commonly used by Arabs to express affection or longing for objects such as idols, prominent mountains, women, and horses (Farahidi, 1995; Ibn Manzur, 1993; Mostafavi, 1981; Qurashi, 1992; Mohana, 1992). Thus, the core meanings of love and desire are inherently embedded in the concept of *mawaddah*. In the non-divine, materialistic worldview of the pre-Islamic period, referred to as *Jahiliyya*, or “the age of ignorance”, *wadd* conveyed a worldly and often hedonistic sense of affection, shaped by desires for status, beauty, or power. The cultural values of this era were centered on passion, pride, and honor, frequently reflected in love for women, horses, swords, and tribal dominance. The concept of *Jahiliyya*, as described by Hawting (2011), is a theological and historical construct developed by Islamic thinkers to characterize the spiritual and moral condition of Arabian society prior to Islam. It represents an Islamic re-evaluation of that era, particularly focusing on the Hijaz region and the sociocultural environment preceding and surrounding the early life of the Prophet Muhammad (d. 632). In this context, the transformation of the term *mawaddah* in the Qur'ānic revelation marks a significant shift, from secular and often superficial affections to a divine, spiritually grounded expression of love.

During the time of the Qur'ānic revelation, the word *mawaddah* appears six times in the Holy Qur'ān. In five of these instances, it refers to different types of friendship or affection: 1) friendship with the Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet's family), 2) friendship with idols, 3) friendship with true believers, 4) friendship with enemies, and 5) friendship with Muslims. In one notable verse—related to the philosophy of marriage, it specifically refers to the affectionate bond between spouses. This diverse network of meanings highlights the

semantic richness of *mawaddah*. Izutsu (2002) emphasized that vocabulary, as the sum of all semantic fields, forms a complex and interconnected network of concepts that relate to and depend on one another in myriad ways.

In particular, the use of *mawaddah* in the verse of 7 of Surah Mumtahnah and the verse of 21 of Surah Ar-Rum, alongside the phrase “يَجْعَلُ بَيْنَكُمْ” (which indicates divine agency), points to a distinction in meaning. While one verse refers to friendship among idols (وَقَالَ إِنَّمَا اتَّخَذْتُمْ مِّن دُونِ اللَّهِ أَوْثَانًا مَّوَدَّةَ بَيْنِكُمْ) (Al-Ankabut: 25), the other verses imply a form of friendship or affection that is established by God. Before the Qur’ān’s revelation, words derived from the root *wadd* and their meanings did not bear any association with divine creation or establishment. Thus, the earliest semantic elevation of this root is its contextual link to divine ordination. Following the revelation, *mawaddah* took on multiple meanings. Over time, in Qur’ānic exegesis and application, the concept of “friendship of idols” underwent a semantic transformation into the notion of “friendship of spouses, the Ahl al-Bayt, and God”. This process is identified as “semantic development” and “semantic elevation” (Ragheb Isfahani, 1995; Mostafavi, 1981; Qurashi, 1992).

5.2. The semantic analysis of *mawaddah* in the verse of 21 of Surah Ar-Rum

In the 21st verse of Surah Ar-Rum, the word *mawaddah* appears alongside other key terms, most notably “آيَات” (*āyāt*), meaning “signs”. This linguistic pairing underscores that marriage and the innate attraction between spouses are considered among the divine signs of God. This raises a critical theological question: what does marriage signify in the Islamic worldview? In other words, what deeper truths or realities does marriage unveil? Scholars and commentators have offered various interpretations. Some, such as Hosseini Shah Abdul Azimi (1984), suggest that marriage and the desire for companionship reflect God’s omnipotence. Others, including Khosravani (2011), interpret marriage as a sign of both God’s monotheism and power. Boroujerdi (1987) further argues that marriage serves as a means through which one may come to know God, particularly in recognizing His oneness. Additionally, Thaqafi Tehrani (2019) views marriage as an expression of divine mercy toward humankind. Allameh Tabataba’i (1996) offers a comprehensive interpretation, asserting that marriage is a sign of God’s unity in both divinity and lordship. He explains that beginning with the verse 20 of Surah Ar-Rum, the verses collectively emphasize God’s singularity in creation and governance, refuting the polytheistic notion that separates God’s role as Creator from the worship of idols. According to Tabataba’i, the Qur’ān clarifies that true Lordship belongs solely to God, and that attributing divinity to others undermines the holistic understanding of tawhid (oneness of God).

The structure and context of the verse clearly indicate that the pronoun in “آيَاتِهِ” refers directly to Allah (الله), rather than to an implied or omitted adverbial phrase related to Allah. Accordingly, the verse should be translated as: “And among the signs of Allah is that He created for you, from yourselves, spouses so that you may find tranquility in them”. This suggests that the primary purpose of the verse is to serve as evidence for the existence of God, rather than merely to describe His attributes—such as monotheism, mercy, or lordship. While these divine attributes are indeed central to Islamic theology and implicitly acknowledged in the verse, they are not the main focus of this particular verse. Instead, the verse presupposes these qualities and employs the phenomenon of marital companionship as a direct sign pointing to the existence of a divine creator. It appears, therefore, that some scholars have conflated the intended signification of this verse—i.e., providing rational

evidence for God's existence—with the secondary implication of affirming certain divine characteristics. This interpretive confusion highlights the need for a more precise semantic and theological analysis of the verse.

In the 21st verse of Surah Ar-Rum, there is ongoing debate regarding the referent of the pronoun “*لَكُمْ*” in the phrase “*خَلَقَ لَكُمْ*”. While the majority of commentators interpret the addressee as all of humanity—both men and women—it is important to consider the linguistic convention in Arabic, where masculine pronouns are often employed generically to refer to both genders. Based on this linguistic norm, it can be argued that the use of the masculine pronoun “*لَكُمْ*” is inclusive and metaphorical rather than exclusive to males. Nonetheless, among classical commentators, Fakhr al-Razi takes a more literal stance, arguing that the addressee is specifically men. According to his interpretation, the verse could be read as: “He created [women] for you [men],” likening the creation of women to other blessings provided for human benefit—such as animals or plants—as seen in the verse “He created for you all that is on the earth” (Al-Baqarah: 29) (Fakhr al-Razi, 1999). However, this interpretation has been widely critiqued on both linguistic and theological grounds. Evidence from other Qur’ānic passages, such as those in Surahs Al-Baqarah, Al-Ma’idah, and Al-Hujurat, supports the inclusive interpretation, asserting that God created spouses for both men and women, so that each might find tranquility in the other. Therefore, a more balanced and contextually sound reading of this verse holds that “*لَكُمْ*” addresses all of humanity, not men alone.

It can be concluded that the pronoun “*لَكُمْ*” in the verse is not restricted to the masculine gender but rather encompasses both men and women. Consequently, the subject of the verb “*لِتَسْكُنُوا*” (so that you may find tranquility) includes both genders. In the terminology of the verse, the term “*سَكَنَ*” denotes rest or stillness following movement, with one of its primary manifestations being inner and interpersonal tranquility. Marriage, therefore, is understood as a means of alleviating both internal and external anxieties, leading to a state of peace. As Tabataba’i (1996) explains, each man and woman is inherently incomplete on their own and achieves wholeness through union with the other. This complementary relationship forms the basis of harmony, allowing marriage to serve as a path toward both emotional and psychological stability, thereby fulfilling a more complete and unified vision of human existence.

In the 21st verse of Surah Ar-Rum, the word *mawaddah* is used in conjunction with several other significant lexical items, forming a syntagmatic relationship that warrants closer semantic analysis. These content words include “*آيَةً*” (sign), “*نَفْسَ*” (self/soul), “*زَوْجَ*” (spouse), “*سَكَنَ*” (tranquility), and “*رَحْمَةً*” (mercy). In the Qur’ānic context, “*آيَةً*” refers to the signs of God—manifestations that originate from a divine source and cannot be imitated by human effort (Qurashi, 1992). The term “*نَفْسَ*” is associated with human nature and the soul, frequently used in the Qur’ān to denote aspects of the self or ego. “*زَوْجَ*” signifies a spouse and is used to refer to both men and women, including animals, and thus carries a generic meaning. In this verse, “*أَزْوَاجَ*” (spouses) clearly includes both genders, indicating mutuality and reciprocity in marital relationships.

The word “*سَكَنَ*” conveys dual meanings: to dwell or reside, and to find peace or tranquility. “*رَحْمَةً*”, meaning mercy or compassion, implies generosity and benevolence.

While it can describe human emotions, it is most profoundly associated with divine grace—the compassionate blessings that flow from a higher source to those in a subordinate or needy position.

The placement of *mawaddah* in this co-text, alongside “سَكَنَ”, “زَوْجَ”, “نَفْسَ”, “آيَةَ” and “رَحْمَةً”, suggests that the unique form of affection granted by God to spouses is not merely emotional, but a divine blessing and a clear sign (“آيَةَ”) of His majesty, deserving of deep contemplation. *Mawaddah* in this context is portrayed as a sacred affection imbued by God after marriage to secure emotional harmony and enduring companionship.

Thus, the implications of the verse 21 of Surah Ar-Rum for human life may be summarized as follows:

- To regard marriage, family formation, and conjugal life as signs of God’s existence and wisdom.
- To understand the purpose of marriage as transcending mere physical gratification or procreation, instead fulfilling a profound human need for emotional and spiritual tranquility.
- To recognize that the foundation of marital stability lies not primarily in legal or social frameworks, but in *mawaddah*—the unique divine affection bestowed by God upon spouses.

5.3. *Mawaddah and human married life*

Verse 21 of Surah Ar-Rum is widely regarded as one of the most significant passages in the Holy Qur’ān concerning the value of family formation and married life. Other Qur’ānic passages that underscore the central role of family in a healthy human society include *An-Nisa’* (4:34) and *Al-Baqarah* (2:187). The concept of “مودَّة” (*mawaddah*) mentioned in this verse—especially in response to Fakhr al-Razi’s claim that “زَوْجَ” (*zawj*) refers exclusively to one gender—should not be understood as a one-sided expectation. Rather, both husband and wife are equally responsible for expressing *mawaddah* in order to sustain a stable and loving marital relationship. Nothing in the verse suggests that only the wife is obliged to demonstrate this affection while the husband is exempt.

The Qur’ān consistently portrays both men and women as equally capable of virtue and equally accountable for their actions, without granting spiritual superiority to either gender. Verses such as *Al-Ma’idah* (5:38), *Aal Imran* (3:195), and *Al-Hujurat* (49:13) exemplify this balanced and inclusive framework. Further evidence for the mutual nature of *mawaddah* is found in the same verse (*Ar-Rum* 30:21), where the plural pronoun “كُم” (“*kum*”) is used. As previously noted, this pronoun typically addresses both male and female audiences in the Qur’ān, as seen in verses like *Al-Baqarah* (2:183).

Perhaps the most compelling support comes from *An-Nisa’* (4:1), where God states that both men and women were created from a single essence or “نَفْسَ” (*nafs*). According to Allameh Tabataba’i (1996), the term *nafs* in this context refers to the shared human nature that defines humanity and distinguishes it from other beings. Similarly, the phrase “لِتَسْكُنُوا” (“*litaskunū ilayhā*”) includes both sexes as its subject. As previously discussed, the verb

“سَكَنَ” (“sakan”) denotes the attainment of tranquility and peace after a state of movement or restlessness. Thus, marriage is depicted as a pivotal moment in human life, wherein both men and women find mental and emotional peace through one another. Because of their inherent differences, they are drawn to each other and, in coming together, achieve mutual completion and comfort (Tabataba’i, 1996).

Mawaddah, as previously discussed, essentially denotes desire and implies affection and love. Its root, “وَدَّ”, signifies affection, as also seen in other Qur’ānic verses, such as Maryam (19:96), where God promises “mawaddah” to the true believers. According to Tabataba’i (1996), this divine affection is a gift granted to those who sincerely believe in God.

The term “mawaddah” is often mentioned alongside “رَحْمَةً” (rahmah), indicating mercy or compassion. The root of rahmah “رَحِمَ” conveys a sense of nurturing and protection, as explained by Ibn Manzur (1993). Through marriage, spouses are expected to exhibit both “mawaddah” and “rahmah.” However, a distinction exists between these two qualities: while rahmah can be one-directional (for instance, compassion from one spouse to the other), mawaddah is inherently reciprocal (Mostafavi, 1981). In the context of marital life, which is fundamentally shaped by mutual emotional and practical needs, the significance of mawaddah becomes especially prominent.

To summarize what has been discussed thus far, the root “وَدَّ” was used in pre-Islamic Arabic to describe earthly love and desire. Prior to the Qur’ānic revelation, its derivatives were not associated with divine or spiritual love. However, with the advent of Islam, the semantic field of “mawaddah” evolved. Love once directed toward idols came to signify profound bonds such as the love between spouses, the love of the Ahl al-Bayt, and love for God. This transformation reflects a meaningful elevation in the term’s conceptual and moral scope.

In verse 21 of Ar-Rum, the word “mawaddah” implies a form of love that is both expressive and mutual. That is, it affects both spouses and is observable through action and responsiveness. This mutual influence emerges from attentiveness to one another’s emotional needs and fosters a sustained cycle of affection, where each partner’s response prompts further acts of care, until, of course, conflict or disruption intervenes (Zamakhshari, 1986).

Some scholars also argue that “mawaddah” conveys the intensity of love. This view stems from the root “وَدَّ”, which, in one interpretation, means “nail” or “mountain.” Thus, mawaddah is likened to a nail embedded firmly in a wall or to a mountain, two-thirds of which is anchored beneath the earth—stable, unmoving, and deeply rooted (Hosseini Shah Abdul Azimi, 1984). In this metaphor, mawaddah resides in the depths of the heart and does not waver or vanish easily.

Therefore, in real life, “mawaddah” is best understood as a combination of reciprocal love and sincerity, arising from genuine faith. Without sincerity, mawaddah ceases to exist in its true form. Mere verbal expressions of affection are insufficient if the heart harbors jealousy or resentment. As such, mawaddah contains a depth of meaning not present in similar terms like “مَحَبَّة” (mahabbah), “رَحْمَةً” (rahmah), or “أُلْفَةً” (ulfah).

In Tafsir Nemooneh, Makarim Shirazi (1995) addresses the question of why the two words “مودة” (*mawaddah*) and “رَحْمَة” (*rahmah*) appear together in verse 21 of Surah Ar-Rum. He explains that these two concepts constitute the fundamental binding forces of human society. Just as a grand and magnificent building is made of individual bricks and stones, so too is society composed of individuals. Without a cohesive bond among these disparate parts, neither a building nor a society can exist. The Creator, who designed humanity for social life, has instilled this essential connection within the soul and nature of every human being.

From this commentary, several important conclusions can be drawn:

1. Marriage and family formation are among the essential means by which a thoughtful and prudent individual may either attain or perfect a divine worldview and deepen their understanding of existence.

2. Verse 21 of Surah Ar-Rum restricts the true privileges and spiritual benefits of marriage to a particular group: those who are reflective and thoughtful, or as the Qur’ān describes them, “يَتَفَكَّرُونَ” (those who reflect).

Furthermore, it may be inferred that, from the Islamic perspective, marriage serves multiple profound purposes:

- First, it is a path to knowing God and acquiring divine knowledge.
- Second, it is a means through which God grants peace and tranquility to the human heart.
- Third, it forms the foundation and essence of the family and perpetuates the love and affection that God places in the hearts of a man and a woman after marriage.

Therefore, one of the principal goals of marriage is to achieve a deep and abiding tranquility through the union of soul and body between the spouses. This tranquility, described in the Qur’ān as “سَكِينَة” (*sakīnah*), is the result of attaining mutual “*mawaddah*” between husband and wife. The one who instills this *mawaddah* in the hearts of human beings is none other than God Himself (Khazā’ī Neyshaburi, 1987; Ghorbani Lahiji, 1995).

6. Conclusion

The term *mawaddah* appears six times in the Holy Qur’ān. Five of these instances refer to various forms of love—towards the Ahl al-Bayt (the family of the Prophet), idols, believers, enemies, and Muslims. In one notable instance, it refers to the affection between spouses, in the verse concerning the philosophy of marriage. With the revelation of the Qur’ān, words took on new life, and this transformation can largely be attributed to the divine, monotheistic worldview of the Qur’ān. This perspective elevated the meanings of words by aligning them with a higher theological and anthropological framework. The semantic development of *mawaddah* illustrates this transformation. The root meaning of the word underwent a kind of divine refinement. Over time, and particularly through Qur’ānic interpretation and application, its use shifted. For example, the notion of love once associated with idol worship evolved into a concept denoting affection between spouses—reflecting its deepened spiritual and ethical dimension in divine discourse. This evolution

represents both a semantic development and an elevation in meaning. An analytical study of the philosophy of marriage, particularly in light of the verse 21 of Surah Ar-Rum, reveals that marriage and family are among the signs of God. The purpose of forming a family goes beyond fulfilling sexual desires or merely continuing the human race. Rather, marriage is intended to foster spiritual tranquility, and the true strength of the family lies not in social or legal structures, but in *mawaddah*, the love and affection instilled by God between spouses.

God has provided means in the Qur'ān to sustain and nurture this affection. One of the most important of these is *mawaddah*, a love expressed in a way that is perceptible to the other, creating a mutual and ongoing exchange of emotion. It is through this reciprocal dynamic that marital affection becomes enduring and spiritually enriching. Reflecting on the word *mawaddah* reveals its profound depth. It conveys a meaning and divine intention that no other synonymous term—such as *rahmah* (mercy), *ulfah* (intimacy), or *mahabbah* (love)—can fully capture. Though psychology views love as a vibrant, life-giving spring flowing through diverse channels, sustaining a shared life between two individuals of differing personalities and backgrounds requires a constant, multifaceted expression of love. This love must manifest in words, behaviors, and interactions—continually renewed and made evident.

It is striking to observe that over 1,400 years ago, the Qur'ān emphasized this very principle, highlighting the foundational role of *mawaddah* in marital life. The divine choice of this term underscores the richness and depth of meaning intended. None of the other commonly used terms for love carry the same theological weight or expressive capacity as *mawaddah*. Finally, while this discussion has focused on the semantic development of *mawaddah*, it is important to recognize that this is only one aspect of a broader semantic analysis. A more comprehensive understanding of Qur'ānic terminology would also require attention to its descriptive and cognitive dimensions—areas which lie beyond the scope of the present study.

Semantic analysis serves as a powerful tool for exploring the meanings of individual words and word combinations, ultimately enhancing the understanding of a text. In the context of the Holy Qur'ān, its importance lies in uncovering the deeper intentions and implications behind divine revelations. Through examining the relationships between words and meanings, semantic analysis reveals how specific vocabulary and phrasing in the Qur'ān engage with various semantic layers. In recent years, there has been growing discussion around the stability of married life and the factors that may threaten it. From an Islamic perspective, this semantic exploration highlights how God's deliberate use of the word *mawaddah* reflects what is essential for sustaining a loving and successful family life—namely, the active expression of love between spouses. The findings of this study have broader implications for both sociolinguistics and the psychology of marriage, as they emphasize the linguistic and emotional significance of affection within marital relationships. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates that the root of *mawaddah* is closely linked to the Islamic understanding of the marital contract and the divine value placed on affection within the framework of married life.

Given the authenticity and originality of the content of the Holy Qur'ān, many content-rich words with profound meanings warrant careful exploration through semantic analysis. It is widely believed that the words of the Qur'ān are irreplaceable, and therefore, their selection is deliberate and purposeful—requiring thorough linguistic and contextual justification. However, there remains a noticeable gap in research related to the historical, descriptive, and cognitive semantic analyses of similar words and word combinations found

in the Qur'ān and broader Islamic sources. Accordingly, it is recommended that scholars undertake further research in this area to uncover Islam's genuine and appreciative perspective on the various roles humans fulfill in life—particularly within social and marital contexts. The present study employed historical semantic analysis to trace the development and transformation of the word *mawaddah*. In addition to the historical dimension, semantic analysis includes descriptive and cognitive components, which can offer further insight into the philosophy of marriage and the emotional and relational dynamics between spouses. Moreover, ongoing debates regarding gender equality in Islam, especially in relation to the Qur'ān, could be revisited through the lens of semantic analysis. Such investigations have the potential to challenge unfounded patriarchal interpretations and to highlight the humanitarian and egalitarian values embedded in Islamic teachings. Semantic analysis enables researchers to identify the distinctive features of Qur'ānic vocabulary that make each term uniquely suited to its context. Future studies are encouraged to incorporate modern, IT-based linguistic tools—such as computational language processing—to systematically examine the occurrences and co-occurrences of key terms in the Qur'ān. This approach would align Islamic scholarship with current trends in semantic and linguistic research worldwide.

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