

*What are the Qira'at, or the Canonical  
Recitations of the Qur'an?*



A Brief Synopsis by  
Ustadha Saaima Yacoob



بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

## *About the Author*

Ustadha Saaima Yacoob is a teacher, and an author and editor of books on Tajwid, Qira'at, Rasm, and Waqf and Ibtida'. She holds multiple ijazat to teach Tajwid and Qiraat from her teachers in the United States as well as in Jordan and Pakistan. She did her Bachelor's in English and her Master's in Education with a focus on Curriculum and Development from George Mason University. With over two decades of teaching experience, she is the founder of Recite With Love, an online institute for Quranic education. She lives with her husband and son in North Carolina.



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*Part One*



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*You may have heard that the Qur'an can be recited in many “ways” or “readings.” What are they, and where do they come from?*

We can say that there are two types of words in the Qur'ān, those that are agreed upon and are always recited in one way, and those which may be recited in multiple ways. The first type of words have been recited in only one way by the ṣaḥābah رضي الله عنهم. The second type of words are those which the ṣaḥābah رضي الله عنهم read in various ways due to differences in dialects of Arabic. Both these types of words were revealed by Allah سبحانه and taught to the ṣaḥābah رضي الله عنهم by the beloved Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم.

Since releasing Qariah, we've received a number of concerns from listeners that the Qariahs are reciting incorrectly. However, the Qariahs are actually reciting in different forms of recitations of the Quran! Read more to learn about how this is possible.



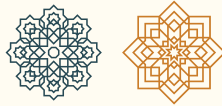
## *What kinds of differences are there in the Canonical Recitations?*

One of the main kinds of differences that a person can hear between the recitations are those that do not have any effect on the meaning of the Qur'an. These are norms from various dialects of Arabic as it was spoken during the time of the Prophet ﷺ, and the Qur'an can also be recited in them. For example, one may hear that the sound of the long vowel "aa" sounds more like "ay" in certain readings. Or, one may notice that the "L" sound is thicker and more heavy sounding in one reading over another. Although these differences do not have an effect on the meaning of the Qur'an, they are governed by rules, and can only be applied according to those rules. The reciter is not applying them according to her own volition, but rather following the way of reading that we have received through preserved chains of transmission.

The second kind of difference is in those words which were revealed in different ways, and add a nuance to the meaning. It is important to note that although the meaning changes somewhat, one canonical recitation does not make something haram that another has made halal. Rather, they add layers of meaning to a single detail or concept that Allah Ta'ala has mentioned. This is part of the miracle of the Qur'an, to have layers and layers of meaning within one text.

*Further Reading:* Explore the Bridges' Translation of the Qur'an on [quran.com](http://quran.com)

# *What Do The Canonical Recitations Do?*



## Part Two

*They help us to have a deeper understanding of the meaning of the Qur'an and they strengthen juristic rulings.*

When scholars of exegesis explain the Qur'an, they take these layers of meaning into account to truly understand what the verse means. When scholars of Islamic jurisprudence arrive at a ruling, they take these canonical readings in mind as well.

*How do we identify these readings?*

You may notice that the Qari'ahs on the app have notes under their name like "Hafs" or "Warsh." The canonical readings of the Qur'an have always existed. In the second and third century hijri, they began to be associated with the names of the reciters that were well known for reciting in a particular combination of these transmitted differences. This is why each reading is referred to by the name of the reciter who recited in this way.

*Further Reading: "Within Its Depth" by Qari Basil Farooq*

*Biographies of the Qurra' whose  
styles are featured on the App*



**Part Three**

*Did you know we have 6 styles featured on the Qariah App?  
Qalun, Warsh, Hafs, Duri, Shu'bah, Khalaf*

The different styles of recitation are named after the most famous early reciter known for teaching that style, and individuals who master a style and receive ijāzah (license to teach) in it become part of an unbroken chain of transmission of that style back to the Prophet ﷺ.

You may have prayed behind a reciter or even heard a reciter on the Qariah app and worried they were making major mistakes in their recitation. You may have become most familiar with Hafs and Warsh, however, you may now realize there are valid differences in the styles of recitation of the Quran. There are some other styles of recitation, all of which include Qalun, Warsh, Hafs, Shu'bah, and Khalaf.

## Qalun

His full name was Isa ibn Mina, and his patronym was Abu Musa.

His nickname was Qaloon, which means beautiful, good, and noble in Greek. His teacher, Imam Nafi' gave him this name because of the beauty and mastery that he had in his recitation of the Qur'an. The reason his teacher chose a Greek word was because Imam Qaloon was of Byzantine ancestry.

He was born in the year 120 AH in the city of Madinah where he would pass away 100 hijri years later in 220 AH. He is buried in Jannat al-Baqi'.

He studied with his teacher for about twenty years, until his teacher, who was also his step father, insisted that he begin teaching. He spent the remainder of his life teaching Qur'an. He was also a great master of the Arabic language.

One of the miracles of Imam Qaloon was that he was deaf, and so much so that he could not hear lightning if it struck, or even the sound of a horn. However, he could correct mistakes very accurately when people recited Qur'an to him. Some scholars suggest that he identified these mistakes by watching the mouth of the reader. It is considered a miracle that one of the greatest Qur'an reciters of al-Madinah al-Munawwarah was himself hard of hearing.

Some lessons that we take from this great Imam of Qur'an recitation are not to be hasty in our journey with the Qur'an, and to have a deep appreciation and yearning for simply keeping its company. The second lesson we take from his life is that regardless of what our personal limitations are, we can still be people of the Qur'an, and if we are sincere, Allah will open doors for us.

His style of recitation is most commonly recited in Libya and Tunisia.



## Warsh

His full name was Uthman ibn Sa'eed. He was born in Egypt in the year 110 AH. His nickname was Warsh, which was given to him by his teacher Imam Nafi' due to his fair and reddish complexion.

He came to al-Madinah al-Muwarrah from Egypt specifically to learn Qur'an from Imam Nafi'. When he arrived, he realized that Imam Nafi' was already occupied with his current students. He decided to sleep in the masjid of the Prophet SAW at night and in the morning Imam Nafi' asked for the "Egyptian" specifically and asked him to begin reciting. It was Imam Nafi's practice to listen to thirty ayat at a time from a student.

When Imam Warsh reached the thirtieth verse, one of his classmates told his teacher that he would like to give Imam Warsh ten verses of recitation time from his own lesson, and another classmate did the same. Imam Warsh's lesson then became fifty ayat, and in this way, he recited the Qur'an multiple times to Imam Nafi'.

One of the lessons that we can derive from his story is to exhaust all our resources in the pursuit of knowledge of the Qur'an, and to seek out its people, and to learn from them. We also see something beautiful in the behavior of his classmates. It is amazing that the sacrifice they made for him was so accepted that more than a thousand years later, it is still being mentioned, and Allah has not allowed us to forget their contribution. No kindness is too small if done for the sake of Allah.

Known to have an extremely beautiful voice, he was a great reciter of the Qur'an in Egypt, and had many amazing and loyal students. His style of recitation is most commonly recited in North and West Africa as well and parts of Sudan. He passed away in 197 AH in Egypt.

## *Duri*

His full name was Hafs ibn Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz al-Duri. His patronym was Abu Omar. He was referred to as al-Duri as he was born in Dur, a neighborhood in western Baghdad. He was born in the year 150 AH.

He traveled extensively, learning the canonical recitations from many teachers. He is regarded as one of the first scholars to write a book collecting the various recitation styles that he learned. Because of the depth of his knowledge, people would travel from far and wide to study with him. He was considered the most knowledgeable person regarding the recitation of the Qur'an in Baghdad in his time. He is the narrator of not only Imam Abu Amr's recitation style but also Imam al-Kisa'i's. In addition to the canonical readings of the Qur'an, he was also very knowledgeable in the science of Qur'anic exegesis and the Arabic language.

Each and every point of knowledge of the Qur'an that we are blessed with by Allah Ta'ala is something to be immensely grateful for. At the same time, while we express gratitude for each of these points of knowledge, we should not allow ourselves to think that we have learned enough. The Qur'an is an ocean whose shore is unreachable and whose depth cannot be fathomed. Just like Imam Duri, we must continue to strive to learn its knowledge throughout our lives, always expressing gratitude, and asking Allah for more. May Allah grant us knowledge of the Qur'an and transform us through it and make it a means of attaining His pleasure and His love. Ameen. His style of recitation is the most prevalent in Sudan and Yemen today.

After having lived a long life in the service of the Qur'an, Imam Duri passed away at the age of 96 in 246 AH in Makkah al-Mukarramah.



## *Hafs*

His full name was Hafs ibn Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz al-Duri. His patronym was He was Hafs ibn Sulayman ibn al-Mughirah al-Asadi. He was born in Kufah in the year 90 AH.

He is a narrator of Imam Asim, and it is the reading of Imam Hafs that is the most prevalent throughout the world in our time. Imam Hafs was the step son of Imam Asim, and as such, spent a lot of time in the company of his step father and teacher. He is considered to have the highest level of mastery in the reading of Imam Asim. Both him and his step father and teacher were freed slaves of the tribe of Banu Asad.

While he spent his life learning and teaching the Qur'an, he earned his living as a cloth trader. He traveled to both Baghdad and Makkah, where many benefited from him and learned the reading of Imam Asim from him.

One of the reasons why Imam Hafs holds the highest level of mastery in his teacher's reading is due to the amount of time that he spent with him. At times, we feel impatient in our journey of learning Qur'an. However, we must realize that the longer we spend in the company of our teacher, and the more times we recite the Qur'an to him/her, the stronger our level of mastery will be. The goal is never to reach the destination, but rather to lose oneself in the beauty of the journey.

He passed away in Kufa in the year 180 AH.

## *Shu'bah*

He was born in the year 95 AH in the city of Kufah. It can be said that his name was Abu Bakr ibn Ayyash.

Scholars have recorded many first names for him, some have recorded 10 while others have recorded 14. Interestingly, this confusion about his name existed during his lifetime as well. The two names that appear the most are Abu Bakr and Shu'bah. He, himself, when asked about his name would often give cryptic answers, such as "When I was born, all the names had already been given out." But, his son reports that his father told him that his kunya, Abu Bakr, and his name were one and the same. When he was passing away, his son asked him again, and he said, "Oh my son, your father has no name." This was, perhaps, due to his humility, suggesting that he did not consider himself someone to be remembered, and Allah knows best. He is referred to as both Shu'bah and Abu Bakr in books.

He was a student of Imam Asim, and preferred his teacher's reading above others. He recited the Qur'an to his teacher three times, and learned the Qur'an from him five verses at a time. He was a very diligent student who would attend class regardless of the weather, and at times, when it rained, he would have to wade through water that would come up to his back in order to reach his teacher.

He was also a narrator of Hadith and was considered to be very reliable in his knowledge of Prophet narrations. He taught the Qur'an for fifty years, and nineteen years before the end of his life, he stopped teaching due to his deteriorating health. On observing the sadness of his sister upon his impending passing, he told her that he had recited the Qur'an 18,000 times in a particular part of his home, so she should not worry.

Living in the convenience of a digitally powered world, we often forget how difficult it was for men and women in the past to seek knowledge. Till today, there are places in the world where young children must leave their villages and towns and live with relatives in other places simply to attend school. We will always be faced with obstacles in whatever we try to accomplish in life. Like Imam Shu'bah, we must be patient and overcome them in an effort to please Allah, Most High. May Allah make our path to Him easy for us. Ameen.

Imam Shu'bah's recitation is the most prevalent in parts of Sudan.

He was a prolific reciter of Qur'an and a very pious man who was diligent about following the sunnah of the Prophet (SAW). He passed away in 193 AH.

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