

Chapter “2”

Sifat Al-Huruf (Characteristics of The Letters)

- **Definition:** *Sifat* is the plural of *sifah*.

- **Linguistically:** It means the features of some person or something, such as describing someone as having knowledge or being , or describing some person or something as being black or white.

- **Terminologically:** It means a fixed manner in which the letters are pronounced, such as the *jahr* (apparent sound), *Isti`la`/Tafkhim* (elevation), *Qalqalah* (echoing) and the like.

- **Benefits:** *Sifat* (characteristics) are considered the scales for the letters wherewith we can distinguish between weak and strong letters, particularly those emitted from the same place of articulation. Illustrating the characteristics of a letter enables one to recognize it when it is pronounced by a person who is physically sound. In general, the *sifat* have three notes:

1. Distinguishing between the letters that share the same place of articulation.
2. Distinguishing between the strong and the weak letters, which enables one to determine which letter can be merged in *idgham* and which cannot. The strong letters cannot be merged with other letters lest their strong characteristics which distinguish them should disappear.
3. Improving the pronunciation of the letters pronounced from different places of articulation.

- **Difference among scholars regarding the number of *sifat*:**

- Imam Ibn Al-Jazari and other scholars who verified his opinion opine that there are **eighteen characteristics**.
- Other opinions of other scholars view that there are **forty four characteristics**.
- As for us, we have chosen the preponderant opinion, which is that there are **twenty characteristics**.

- **Division of Characteristics:** *Sifat* fall into two categories: **circumstance-based and intrinsic**.

1- Circumstance-based Characteristic

- **Definition:** they are the characteristics that are only present in a letter in particular cases, but are not present in the same letter at other times, such as *tafkhim* (heaviness) and *tarqiq* (lightness).

2- Intrinsic Characteristics

- **Definition:** they are the characteristics that never leave the letter, such as *qalqalah* (echoing) and *shiddah* (strength). Intrinsic characteristics in turn fall into two categories:

- **Divisions:** Two divisions:

A- Intrinsic characteristics that have opposites

There are eleven characteristics, as follows:

The characteristic	Its opposite
Jahr (being apparent)	Hams (whispering)
Shiddah (strength)	Rakhawah (softness) and Tawasut/Bayniyyah (in-between)
Isti'la' (elevation)	Istifal (lowering)
Itbaq (adhering to the roof of the mouth)	Infitah (openness)
izhlaq (flowing letters)	Ismat (pronounced with difficulty)

A- Characteristics with no opposites

They are nine in number, as follows:

Safir (whistling), *qalqalah* (echoing), *leen* (easiness), *inhiraf* (drifting), *takrir* (repetition), *tafashshy* (spreading the sound), *istitalah* (lengthening the sound), *khafa'* (hidden sound), and *ghunnah* (nasalization).

A- Characteristics (Sifat) With Opposites

1- Hams

- **Definition:**

- **Linguistically:** it refers to a whisper.

- **Terminologically:** it means that the breath flows when pronouncing the letter which has *hams* due to their only slight dependence on (or attachment to) their *makharij*. It has ten letters found in the combination stated by Imam Ibn Al-Jazari: فحذَّه شخصٌ سَكَت

(They are *fa'*, *hā'*, *tha'*, *ha'*, *shīn*, *kha'*, *sād*, *sīn*, *kaf* and *ta'*.)

2. Jahr (Being Apparent)

- **Definition:** It is the opposite of *hams*.

- **Linguistically:** it means to announce something loudly or publicly.

- **Terminologically:** it means that the breath is blocked when pronouncing these letters due to their strong attachment to their places of articulation.

- **Letters:** The letters of *jahr* are all the remaining letters of the Arabic alphabet besides the letters of *hams*

(*hamzah, ba', jīm, dal, dhal, ra', zay, dād, tā', zha', `ayn, ghayn, qaf, lam, mīm, nun, waw, ya', alif, waw maddiyyah* (lengthened *waw*) and *ya' maddiyyah* (lengthened *ya'*)).

3. Shaddah (Strength)

- **Definition:**

- **Linguistically:** It means strength.

- **Terminologically:** It means that the sound is blocked when pronouncing these letters due to their strong attachment to their places of articulation.

- **Letters:** The letters of *shaddah* are the eight letters found in the combination stated by Imam Ibn Al-Jazari: أَجْدُ قَطٍ بَكْتُ

(*hamzah, the jīm, the dal, the qaf, the tā', the ba', the kaf and the ta'*).

4. Tawasut (in-between)

- **Definition:**

- **Linguistically:** It means moderation.

- **Terminologically:** It means that this *sifah* is in-between *shiddah* and *rakhawah*. Its sound doesn't flow as in *rakhawah*, nor is it blocked as in *jahr*.

- **Letters:** Five which are found in the combination stated by Imam Ibn Al-Jazari:

لِنْ عُمَر

(*lam, the nun, the `ayn, the mīm and the ra'*)

5. Rakhawah (softness)

- **Definition:** This is the opposite of *shiddah*.

- **Linguistically:** It means softness.

- **Terminologically:** It means that the sound is allowed to flow when pronouncing the letters due to their weak dependence on (or attachment to) their places of articulation.

- **Letters:** There are eighteen letters that have *Rakhawah*. They are the eighteen letters remaining after excluding the letters of *shiddah* and *tawasut*.

(*tha', the ḥā', the kha', the dhal, the zay, the sīn, the shīn, the sād, the dād, the zha', the ghayn, the fa', the ha', the waw, the ya', the alif, the waw maddiyyah* (lengthened *waw*) and the *ya' maddiyyah* (lengthened *ya'*)).

6- Isti`la' (elevation)

- Definition:

- **Linguistically:** It means highness and elevation.

- **Terminologically:** It refers to raising most or some of the tongue when pronouncing its letters so that it touches the upper palate.

- **Letters:** Seven letters combined in the phrase stated by Imam Ibn Al-Jazari:

خُصَّ ضَغَطَ قَطْ.

(*kha'*, the *sād*, the *dād*, the *ghayn*, the *tā'*, the *qaf* and the *zha'*)

- **Note:** Scholars of Tajwid unanimously agree that these seven letters have the characteristic of *tafkhim* (heaviness/said with a full mouth).

7- Istifal (lowering)

- **Definition:** It is the opposite of *isti`la'* (elevation).

- **Linguistically:** It means lowering.

- **Terminologically:** It means that the back part of the tongue is not raised, but instead it lays low when its letters are being pronounced.

- **Letters:** It is found in all the letters of the Arabic alphabet other than the letters of *isti`la'* (elevation).

(*hamzah*, the *ba'*, the *ta'*, the *tha'*, the *jīm*, the *hā'*, the *dal*, the *dhal*, the *ra'*, the *zay*, the *sīn*, the *shīn*, the *`ayn*, the *fa'*, the *kaf*, the *lam*, the *mīm*, the *nun*, the *ha'*, the *waw*, the *ya'*, the *alif*, the *waw maddiyyah* (lengthened *waw*) and the *ya' maddiyyah* (lengthened *ya'*).

8- Itbaq (adhering to the roof of the mouth)

- Definition:

- **Linguistically:** It means adhesion.

- **Terminologically:** It means that all the central part of the tongue touches or covers the hard palate when pronouncing the letters that have this characteristic, where the letter is held between them.

- **Letters:** Four letters, namely, the *sād*, the *dād*, the *tā'* and the *zha'*. Yet, there are different levels of strength of Itbaq (adhering to the roof of the mouth) for these letters.

9- Infitah (openness)

- **Definition:** It is the opposite of *itbaq*.

- **Linguistically:** It means separation or openness.

- **Terminologically:** It means that the tongue keeps away from the upper palate, so allowing the breath to flow through the mouth when its letters are being pronounced.

- **Letters:** All the remaining letters of the Arabic alphabet other than the letters of

itbaq. (*hamzah*, *ba'*, *ta'*, *tha'*, *jīm*, *hā'*, *kha'*, *dal*, *dhal*, *ra'*, *zay*, *sīn*, *shīn*, *`ayn*, *ghayn*, *fa'*, *qaf*, *kaf*, *lam*, *mīm*, *nun*, *ha'*, *waw*, *ya'*, *alif*, *waw maddiyyah* (lengthened *waw*) and *ya' maddiyyah* (lengthened *ya'*).

10- Izhlaq (flowing letters)

- Definition:

- **Linguistically:** It means sharpness, eloquence and fluency of the tongue. It is also stated that it is the tip of the tongue.

- **Terminologically:** It refers to the agility of pronouncing a letter due to it being easy to say since it is produced at the *zhalaq* (tip of the tongue), or one or both of the two lips.

- **Letters:** Six letters in the phrase stated by Imam Ibn Al-Jazari: فِرٌّ مِنْ لُبِّ

(fa', ra', mīm, nun, lam and ba')

11- Ismat (pronounced with difficulty)

- **Definition:** It is the opposite of *Izhlaq*.

- **Linguistically:** It means prevention.

- **Terminologically:** It refers to the difficulty in pronouncing the letter due to its place of articulation being far away from the tip of the tongue and the lip.

- **Letters:** All the twenty five remaining letters of the Arabic alphabet other than the letters of *izhlaq*.

(hamzah, ta', tha', jīm, hā', kha', dal, dhal, zay, sīn, shīn, sād, dād, tā', zha', `ayn, ghayn, qaf, kaf, ha', waw, ya', alif, waw maddiyyah (lengthened waw) and ya' maddiyyah (lengthened ya').)

B- Characteristics (Sifat) Without Opposites

1- Safir (whistling)

- Definition:

- **Linguistically:** It means a sound that resembles the chirping of birds.

- **Terminologically:** It means a fricative consonant sound, in which the tip, or blade, of the tongue is brought upwards towards the roof of the mouth and air is pushed past the tongue to make a hissing sound when pronouncing one of its letters.

- **Letters:** Three letters that have the *safir* characteristic, namely the *sād*, the *zay* and the *sīn*. The *sād* resembles the sound of swans, the *zay* resembles the sound of bees, and the *sīn* resembles the sound of locusts.

2- Qalqalah (echoing)

- Definition:

- **Linguistically:** It refers to a shaking or disturbance.
- **Terminologically:** It refers to the disturbance at the place of articulation when one of the letters bearing this characteristic is being pronounced, making it seem as if they are being read with an echo.
- **Letters:** Five letters combined together in the phrase that was stated by Imam Ibn Al-Jazari: قَطَّبْتُ جَدًّا.
- **Divisions:** There are three positions of *qalqalah* depending on which of these letters are being pronounced:
 1. The highest: this is found in the *tā'*;
 2. Middle: This is found in the *jīm*; and
 3. Lowest: This is found in the three remaining letters.

Levels: There are four degrees of *qalqalah* falling into two categories: **Full or major qalqalah, and Intrinsic qalqalah**

First: Full or major qalqalah

- Has the highest three levels/degrees:
 - 1- With the *mushadad* (doubled) consonant when pausing on it (i.e. at the end of a word which is not pronounced with the word that follows it), such as in (الحقّ). This is the strongest *qalqalah*.
 - 2- With the non-*mushadad* (a single) consonant when pausing on it (i.e. at the end of a word which is not pronounced with the word that follows it), such as in (خلاق). This is the next in strength.
 - 3- With the the consonant with a *sukun* on it when it is pronounced with the letter that follows it, such as in (خلقنا). This is the next in strength.

Second: Intrinsic qalqalah

- Has the final level which is with the vowelled consonant, such as in (المتقين).

- **How the Qalqalah is formed:** As for the manner of *qalqalah*, there is a difference in opinion among Tajwid scholars in this regard with two opinions:

- **First opinion: that it is totally like Fat-hah.** This is the preponderant opinion.
- **Second Opinion: stated that qalqalah takes the same rule as the preceding letter:** Thus, if it is preceded by a *Fat-hah* such as the case in the word "أقرب" (*aqrab*), its pronunciation should have a *fat-hah* vowel; if preceded by a *kasrah* such as the case in the word "أقرأ" (*iqra'*), its pronunciation should have a *kasrah* vowel; and if preceded by a *dammah* such as the case in the word "أقتلوا" (*uqtulu*), its pronunciation should have a *dammah* vowel.

3. Leen (easiness)

- Definition:

- **Linguistically:** It means easiness.
- **Terminologically:** it means pronouncing the sound with ease and without difficulty or any exertion of the tongue.
- **Letters:** Two, namely *waw* and *ya'* which are void of any vowel *harakah* and are preceded by a letter that has a *fat-hah* on it such as "خَوْف" (*khawf*) and "بَيْت" (*bayt*).

4. Inhiraf (drifting)

- Definition:

- **Linguistically:** It means drifting and changing place.
- **Terminologically:** It means that after exiting from its place of articulation when pronouncing the letter, the letter drifts towards another place of articulation by joining the following letter in pronunciation.
- **Letters:** Its two letters are the *lam* and the *ra'*,

5. Takrir (repetition)

- Definition:

- **Linguistically:** It means repetition.
- **Terminologically:** It means that the top tip of the tongue shudders when this letter is being pronounced.
- **Letter:** One letter, that is the *ra'*.
- **How to perform:** The top tip of the tongue should slightly shudder only once, so that the characteristic should not perish altogether. The way for a good reciter to avoid this error is by putting the top tip of his tongue against his upper front palate and make the duration of the shudder of the tongue not last long.

6. Tafashy (spreading the sound)

- Definition:

- **Linguistically:** It means spreading widely.
- **Terminologically:** It means that the breath is made to spread out through the tongue and the upper palate when pronouncing this letter.
- **Letter:** Its letter is the *shīn*

7. Istitalah (lengthening the sound)

- Definition:

- **Linguistically:** It means lengthening.
- **Terminologically:** It means that the sound is lengthened by allowing it to flow from the beginning of the side of the tongue at the back of the mouth until its end near the teeth when pronouncing this letter.
- **Letter:** Its letter is the *dād*

8. Khafa' (hiding the sound)

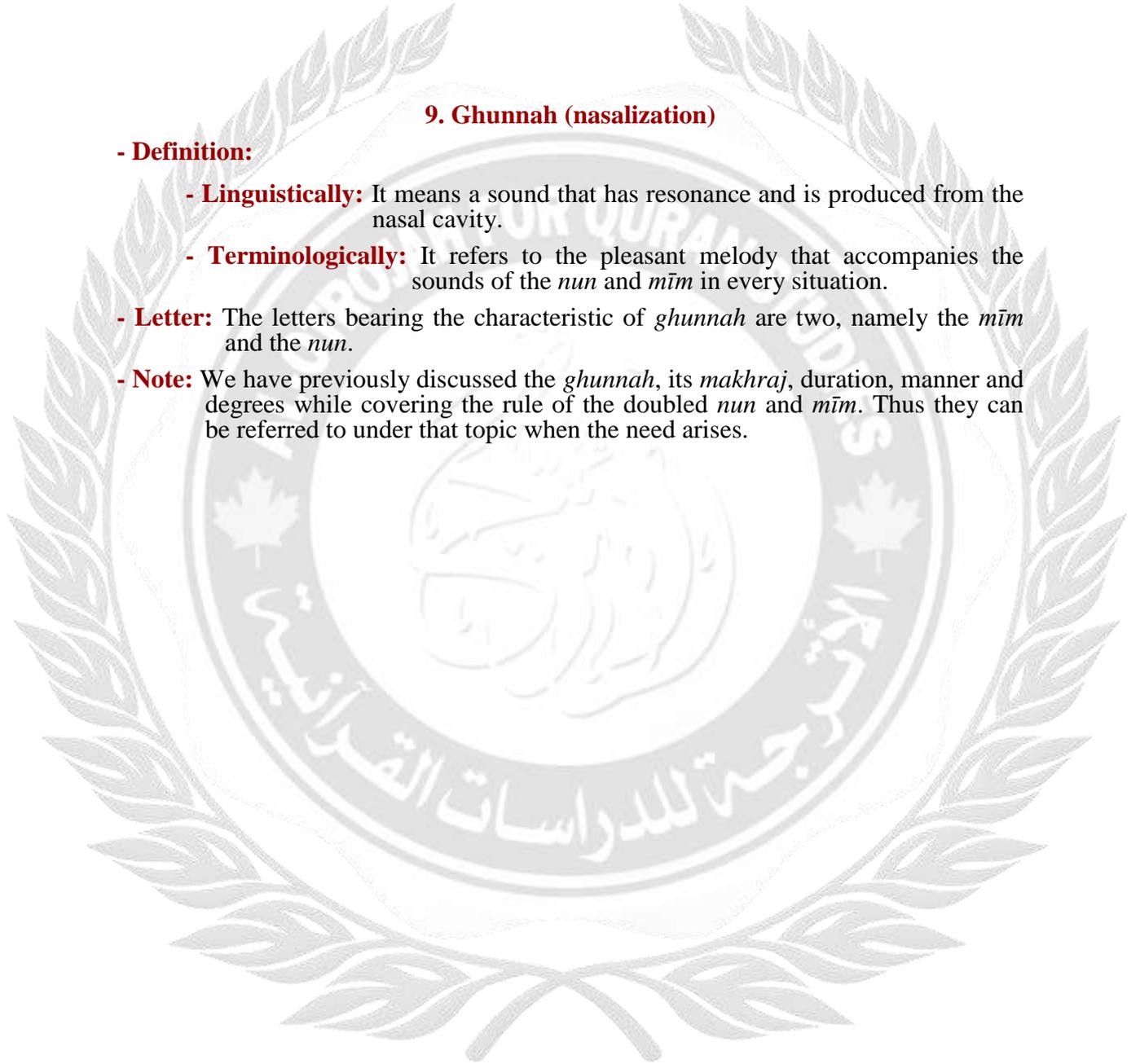
- Definition:

- **Linguistically:** It means screening.
- **Terminologically:** It means hiding the sound of a letter when pronouncing it.
- **Letter:** Three lengthened letters plus the *ha'*, combined together in the word: "هاوي".

9. Ghunnah (nasalization)

- Definition:

- **Linguistically:** It means a sound that has resonance and is produced from the nasal cavity.
- **Terminologically:** It refers to the pleasant melody that accompanies the sounds of the *nun* and *mīm* in every situation.
- **Letter:** The letters bearing the characteristic of *ghunnah* are two, namely the *mīm* and the *nun*.
- **Note:** We have previously discussed the *ghunnah*, its *makhraj*, duration, manner and degrees while covering the rule of the doubled *nun* and *mīm*. Thus they can be referred to under that topic when the need arises.



Letters With Regard To Their Characteristics

If you want to determine the characteristics of any of the letters of the alphabet, you should know first that any letter of the alphabet does not have less than five or more than seven characteristics. You should then carry out the following steps:

First: Search for it in the characteristics that have opposites

	Characteristic (Sifah)	In Between	Opposite
1	Hams فحته شخص سكت	-	Jahr (The rest of the alphabet)
2	Shaddah أجد قط بكت	Tawasut لن عمر	Rakhawah (The rest of the alphabet)
3	Isti'laa' خُصَّ ضَغَطُ قَطِّ	-	Istifal (The rest of the alphabet)
4	Itbaq ط ، ص ، ض ، ظ	-	Infitah (The rest of the alphabet)
5	Izhlaq فَرَّ من لب	-	Ismat (The rest of the alphabet)

* The letters of istifal are the rest of the alphabet except alif, ra' and lam.

Second: Search for it in the characteristics that don't have opposites

- Then move on to the following table to know the characteristics which do not have opposites:

	Characteristic (Sifah)		Characteristic (Sifah)
1	Tafashy "ش"	5	Safir "ص ، ز ، س"
2	Istitalah "ض"	6	Qalqalah قُطْبُ جَدِّ
3	Khafa' The 3 letters of Madd & Ha' " ه "	7	Leen " و " & " ي " With sukun & before it Fatha
4	Takrir "ر"	8	Inhiraf "ر ، ل"
9	Ghunnah		"م ، ن"

- Note:

- Any letter of the alphabet does not have less than five characteristics or more than seven.
- The only letter that has seven characteristics is the ra'.
- Some letters are united in their characteristics and they are:
 1. The kaf (ك) and ta' (ت)
 2. The mim (م) and nun (ن)
 3. The tha' (ث) and hhaa' (ح)
 4. The jim (ج) and dal (د)
 5. The zhal (ذ), waw (و) and ya' (ي) with harakah
 6. The leen waw and ya'
 7. Letters of Madd

Classifying Characteristics According to Strength

A- Weak Characteristics Six Characteristics	B- Neither Weak nor Strong Characteristics Three Characteristics	C- Strong Characteristics 11 Characteristics
Hams (whispering)	Izhlaq (flowing letters),	Jahr (being apparent)
Rakhawah (softness)	Ismat (pronounced with difficulty)	Shiddah (strength)
Istifal (lowering)	Tawasut/bayniyyah (in-between)	Isti'la' (elevation)
Infitaḥ (openness)	-	Iṭbaq (adhering to the roof of the mouth),
Leen (easiness)	-	Safir (whistling)
Khafa' (hiding the sound)	-	Qalqalah (echoing)
-	-	Inhiraḥ (drifting)
-	-	Takrir (repetition)
-	-	Tafashshy (spreading the sound)
-	-	Istitalah (lengthening the sound)

Classifying Letters According to Strength

- A letter is strong to the extent of which it has strong characteristics, and vice versa with the weak characteristics. The letters are divided into **five groups**:

1- Strongest Letters

- **Definition:** The one whose characteristics are all strong.
- **Letters:** One letter: Tā' (ط).

2- Strong Letters

- **Definition:** The ones who have more strong characteristics than weak characteristics.
- **Letters:** Eight, which are as follows: the ba' (ب), the jīm (ج), the dal (د), the ra' (ر), the sāḍ (ص), the dād (ض), the zha' (ظ) and the qaf (ق).

3- Moderate Letters

- **Definition:** Those who have the same number of strong and weak characteristics.
- **Letters:** Five, and are as follows: the hamzah, the ghayn (غ), the lam (ل), the mīm (م), and the nun (ن), combined in the word "الغنم".

4- Weak Letters

- **Definition:** The ones who have more weak characteristics than strong characteristics.
- **Letters:** Ten: the ta' (ت), the kha' (خ), the dhal (ذ), the zay (ز), the sīn (س), the shīn (ش), the `ayn (ع), the kaf (ك), and the vowelled and soft waw (و) and ya' (ي).

5- Weakest Letters

Seven, and they fall into **two types**:

- The letters which have four weak characteristics and only one strong characteristic. These letters **do not have a clearly defined makhraj**. These are the **three letters of madd** (lengthened letters).
- The letters whose **characteristics are all weak**. These are the **four letters**: the tha' (ث), the hā' (ح), the fa' (ف) and the ha' (ه).

Review



- ❑ **The sifat of the letters are the characteristics which differentiate one letter from another.**
- ❑ **The sifat are divided into intrinsic and circumstantial.**
- ❑ **The intrinsic sifat are divided into those which have opposites (11), and those which do not have opposites (9).**
- ❑ **The sifat are divided based on their strength and weakness: strong, weak, and neither strong nor weak.**
- ❑ **The strongest letter is the ttaa' (ط) and the weakest is the haa' and the three letters of madd.**



Test Your Knowledge!



A- Fill in the blanks

1. Of the letters that have isti'la' and hams are _____, and of the letters that have istifal and izhlaq are _____.
2. The letters that have one sifah which no other letters have are _____.
3. The letters that are medium in strength are five and they are _____, _____, _____, and _____.
4. The three sifah that are not defined by strength or weakness are: _____, _____, and _____.
5. Tawasut is _____, whereas khafa' is _____.

B- True or False

1. The letters of ismat are combined in the term "افر من لب". ()
2. The Sad is considered from the letters of isti'la' with infitah and rakhawa. ()
3. The strongest letter there is, is the ra' because it has seven sifah. ()
4. The strongest safir (whistling) is in the seen, then the zay, then the sad. ()
5. The strongest letter in the characteristic of hams is the taa' (ط), and the strongest in the characteristic of isti'la' is the sad. ()

C- Write the characteristics (sifah) of each letter with its strength:

- 1.Lam:.....
- 2.Ra':.....
- 3.Dad':.....
- 4.Leenya':.....
- 5.Mim:.....
- 6.Ttaa'(ط):.....