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Alif				
Bā'				
Tā'				
Thā'				
Jīm				
Ḥā'				
Khā'				
Dāl				
Dhāl				
Rā'				
Zāy				
Sīn				
Shīn				
Ṣād				

Name	Isolated	Final	Middle	Initial
Ḍād				
Ṭā'				
Ẓā'				
‘Ayn				
Ghayn				
Fā'				
Qāf				
Kāf				
Lām				
Mīm				
Nūn				
Wāw				
Hā'				
Yā'				

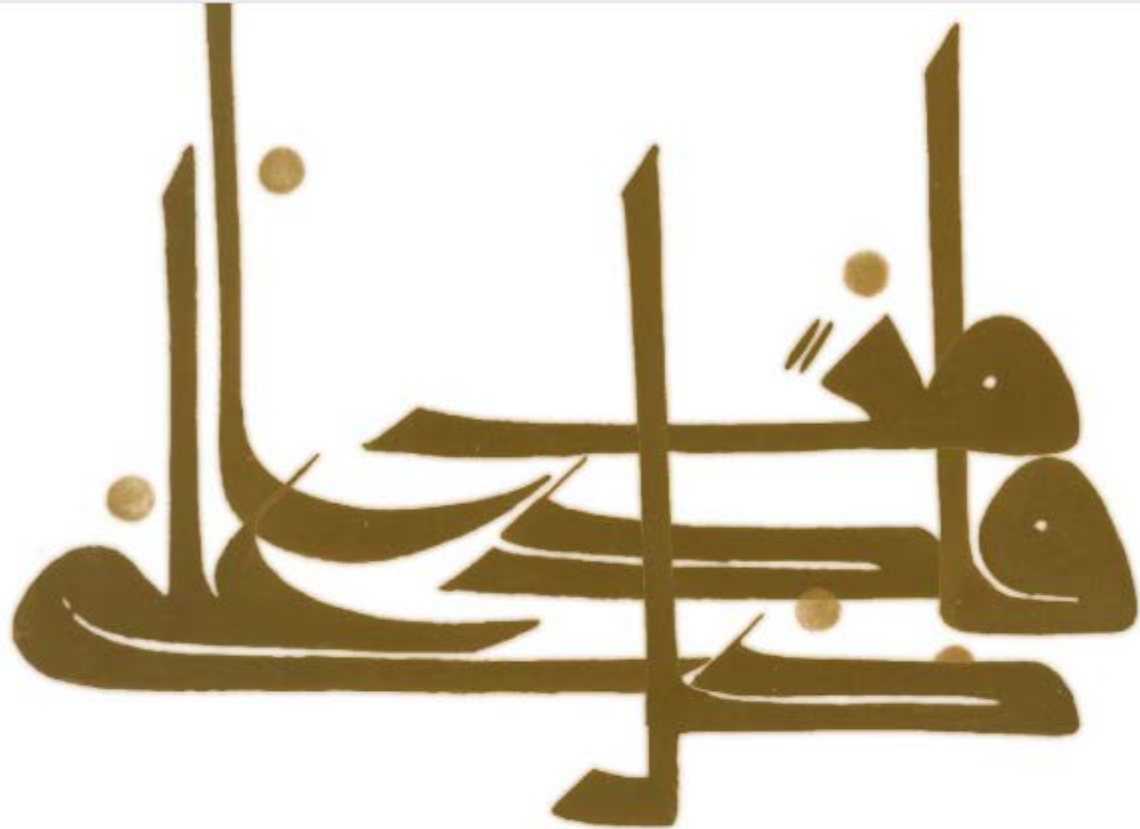


For the novice calligrapher, it is important to accept that the movements must be slow, and that the acquisition of skill will involve disappointingly clumsy work at first. Holding the qalam at about 90° to the page does not come naturally. It lifts the hand off the page and thus robs the calligrapher of a source of stability that he or she has probably taken for granted until now. To some extent, this contact can be substituted with the tips of the fourth and fifth fingers, but this is a new habit to learn and there is no substitute for developing steadiness without support.

Conscious care must also be taken to keep the elbow of the writing arm free. Although clamping it to one's side seems to provide support at first, it actually cramps the writer and thus prevents the all-important smooth manipulation of the qalam.

The western student may discover an unexpected additional problem resulting from the right to left writing direction: the pen and the hand can drag and crease the page, even when proper writing habits are maintained to reduce contact with the page. This is especially so in hot weather. It will take practice to eliminate this problem.

Learning to control the qalam and page without support and at a slow speed emphasizes to the novice calligrapher that Primary Kufic was developed to record the Qur'an accurately, respectfully, and with full spiritual attention.



For those who have not engaged with Arabic reading or calligraphy before, it is necessary to point out that the Arabic alphabet includes several forms for each letter, whose use depends on their placement in the text.

In fact, this need not disturb the western student too much, since the Latin alphabet also includes different forms for capitals and cursive, and has variants appropriate to different scripts or font styles (consider the difference between a cursive Times “g” and an Arial “g”). Similarly, the Arabic alphabet has several forms for each letter that differentiate between four contextual uses:

- a. Isolated – where the letter appears alone as a free-standing letter, or when its nearest neighbors are non-joining letters.
- b. Initial – where the letter appears at the beginning of a word or cluster of joined letters. Note that a word may consist of several clusters of joined letters. Each cluster will begin with an initial form.
- c. Medial – where the letter appears between two joining letters, so that it is connected in front and behind.
- d. Final – where the letter appears at the end of a word or cluster of joined letters, and is joined only from behind. Again, note that a word may consist of several clusters of joined letters, and each cluster will end with a final form.

The reader and writer must therefore expect to become familiar with all these forms, as well as extra variants. In Primary Kufic, for example, the letter yā’ has three variants that can be used as alternatives in the isolated and final locations.

In the teaching section below, the letters are explained in the variant-order listed above, and several examples are also given to show the letters in use.



ف



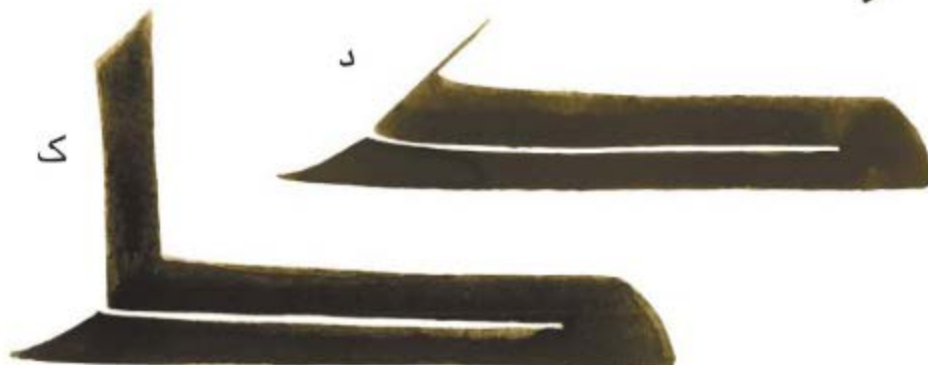
ص



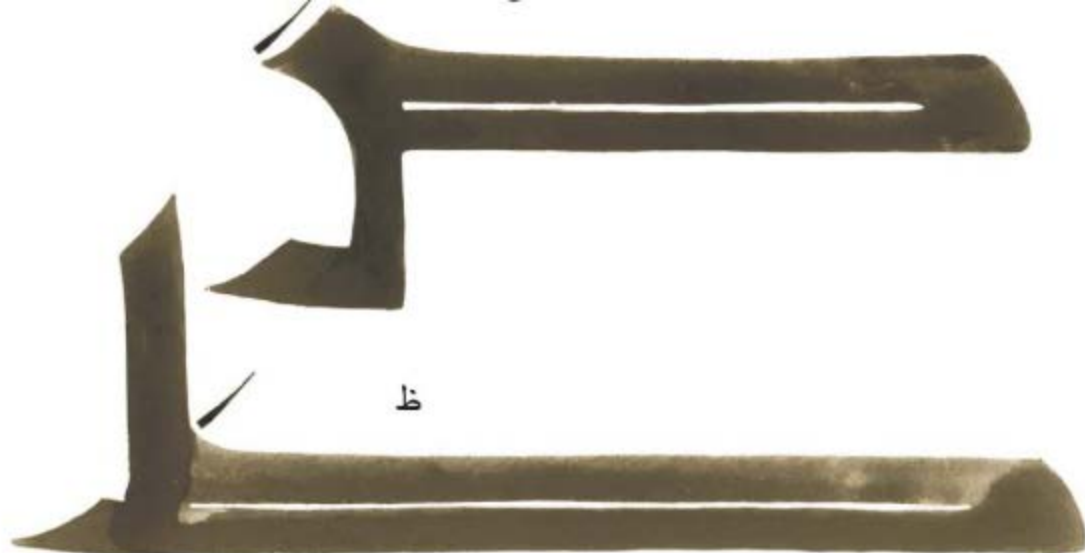
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د



ك

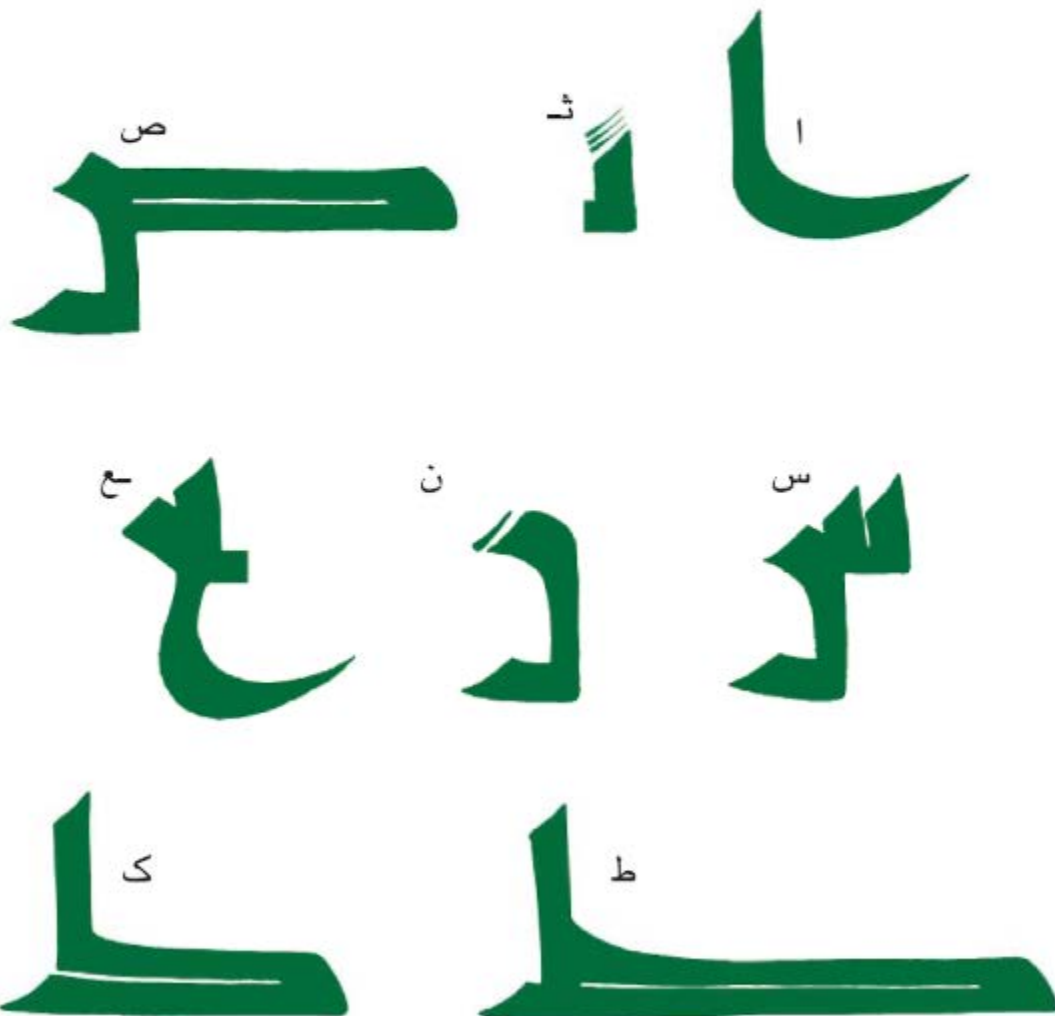


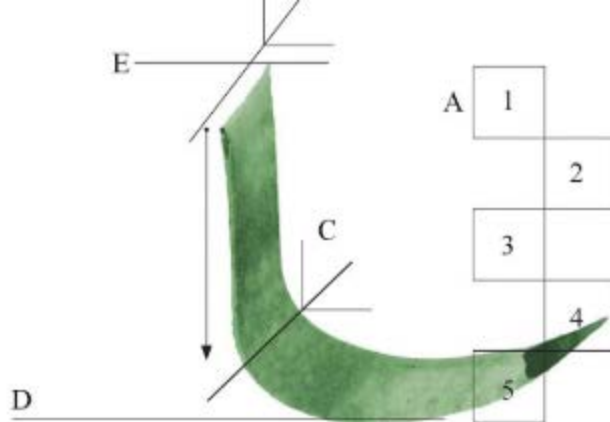
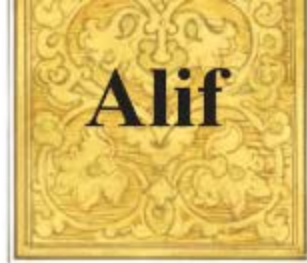
almost circular or almost part circular. The six almost full circle letters are mīm, fā', wāw, qāf, yā' and hā' (note that fā' and yā' also belong to the group of long letters). The three part-circle letters are jīm, ḥā' and khā'. Two other letters are closely related to this group. They are, rā' and zāy.



3- The Vertical and Toothed Letters

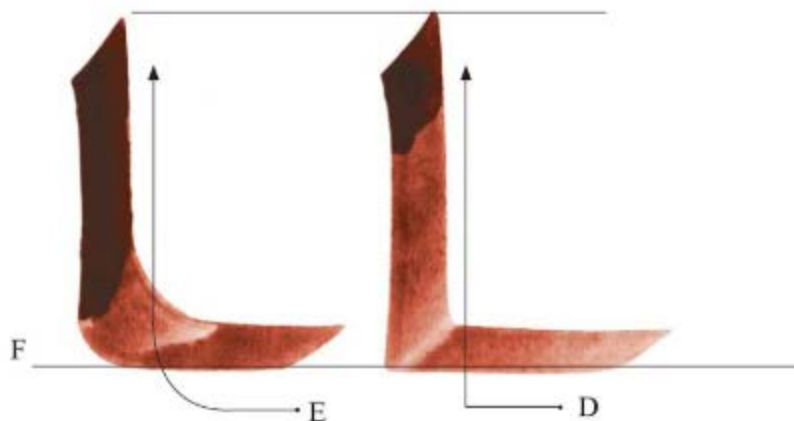
These are the letters whose body is formed with a vertical stroke. The four vertical letters are, alif, lām, kāf', tā' and dhā' (note that thā' and dhā' also belong to the long letters group). The eight toothed letters are, bā' and tā' and thā', sīn and shīn, ṣād and ḍād, and nūn (note that bā' and tā' and thā', ṣād and ḍād, also belong to the long letters group).





Simply put, the alif is the most important letter of the Arabic alphabet. It has been explained by authors like ‘Ibn Arabi that its sound, originally a glottal stop (although now also including the vowel “ah”), is the opening sound for all the other letters, whereas none of their sounds are needed to form the alif. Thus they all depend on it, while it depends on none. In this, of course, it parallels our understanding of God, the origin of all things and on whom all depend, while He depends on nothing and no one. The calligrapher invokes this sacred symbolism of the self-sustaining alif whenever the letter occurs at the beginning of a word or syllable by letting it stand in isolation, as a complete syllable in itself.

The other half of the symbolism, in which the letters depend on the alif, is also invoked by the calligrapher in the proportional system that controls the entire Primary Kufic script. Designating a point measure from the diagonal touch of a correctly held qalam and recognizing the perfection symbolized by the number five, the calligrapher can trace a perfect alif at a height of five points. The other letters all take their dimensions in relation to this perfect alif. We therefore encourage you to pay great attention to forming this deceptively simple-looking letter appropriately. It is the origin and control of all the rest.



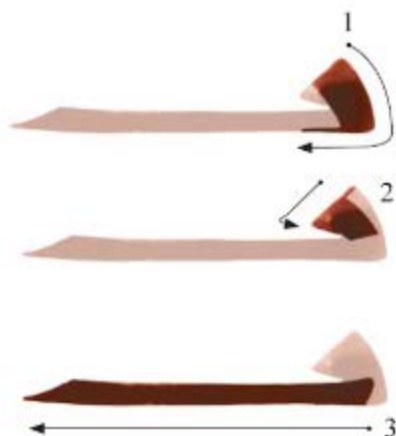
So, for the isolated form of the alif, start with the qalam in the normal position and set it at the fifth point above the baseline. Slowly draw the qalam downwards for four points. Shift the qalam to the dipped position and start a smooth curve towards the right until the baseline is reached. Continue the smooth curve outwards and upwards until the alif is five points wide. End the curve with a sharp tip one and a half points above the baseline.

For the medial or final alif, start on the baseline with the qalam in the normal position. Draw the qalam to the left until it has barely passed the previous letter. Then make a hard or soft angle to echo the previous letter and take the line upwards for a distance of five points.

When making the letter with an ordinary pen, it is not necessary to hold the pen like a qalam. Set the pen down at the standard height (on the baseline above the word being written). Bring it down vertically almost to its own baseline and make a shallow curve to the right about three quarters of the standard measure.

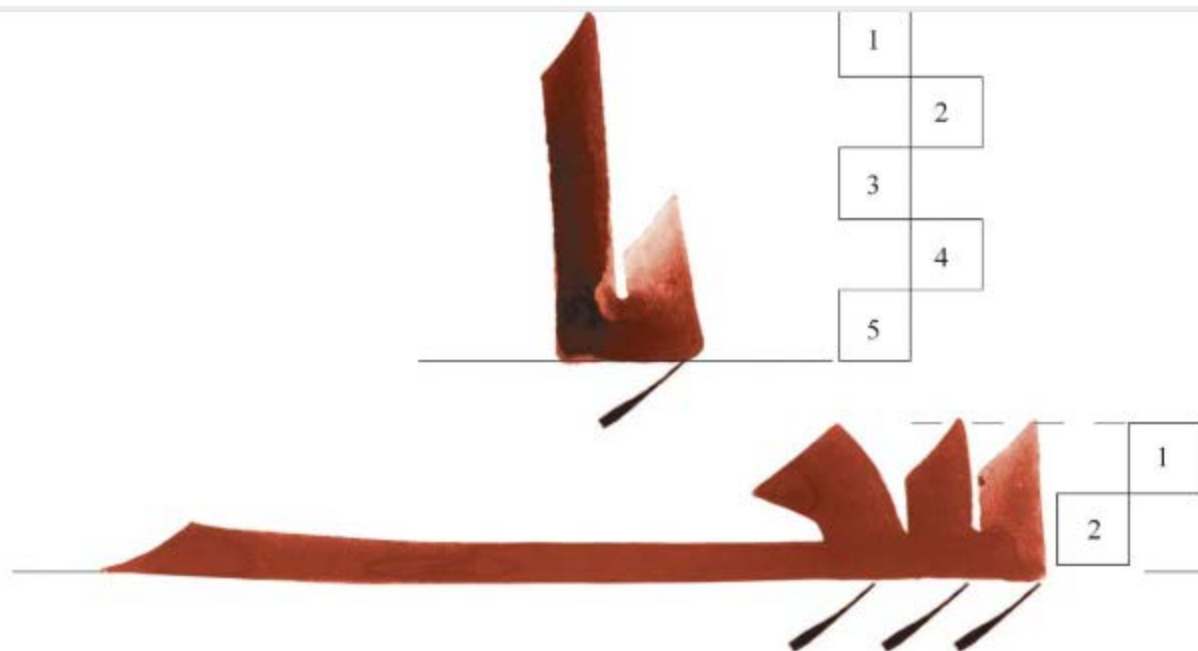
For the medial or final alif with an ordinary pen, make the letter as with a qalam, remembering to focus attention on achieving an even line thickness and a smooth ink flow.





The letter *bā'* contrasts with *alif* in almost every possible way. In sound, it begins with an explosive burst of air from pursed and pressed lips. In writing, it is low and horizontal. It has a short, thick, upright “tooth” and a horizontal tail that can be extended at the calligrapher’s discretion. Some reasons to extend the tail might include the aesthetic needs of the page, emphasizing the meaning of the text, or perhaps evoking the cadence of *tajweed* (chanting rhythms for the Qur’an). When the extension is extreme (known as *extreme mashq'*), the written lines should be set further apart to balance the page.

The isolated and final forms of the letter *bā'* are made with three strokes. For the first stroke, begin with the qalam in the dipped position so that only the straight lower part of the tip is in contact with the page. Start at the second point above the baseline. Make a slightly curved diagonal trace down to the baseline, rolling the qalam on the way so that it finishes in the full shallow-tip position or in the detail position. Still on the baseline, slide the qalam sideways to make a fine horizontal mark. Break contact with the page and return to the top of the tooth with the qalam in the dipped position. For the second stroke, slide the qalam diagonally along the straight edge of the tip to widen the top of the tooth. Then, keeping the qalam at this angle, make a short downward curve to meet the base of the first stroke. For the third stroke, preferably without lifting the qalam, roll it to the medium shallow-tip position and trace a horizontal tail along the baseline. Thicken the stroke near its end by rolling the qalam a little towards the normal position. Be sure to keep the entire tip in contact with the page to form a nicely pointed and curved diagonal end to the tail.



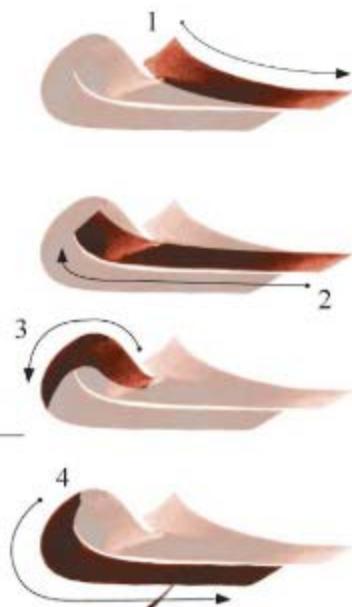
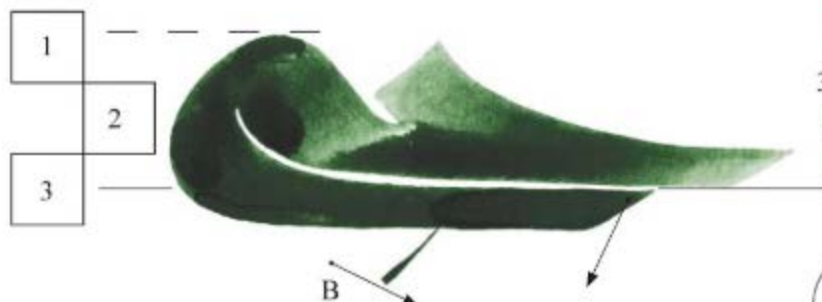
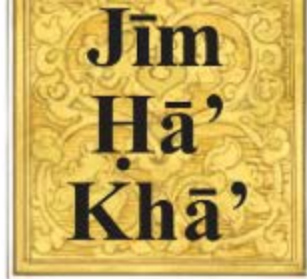
As we have said, this tail may be as long as the calligrapher decides, but it must be done freehand and without raising the qalam from the page. Forming a long straight line in this way takes practice and it is where the skill lies, so we encourage you to take the necessary time to gain mastery of this letter.

Be sure to add the i'jām under the tooth of the letter.

For the initial and medial forms of the letter bā', the tooth will be straight and vertical or near-vertical. In contrast with the tooth of the isolated form, this tooth is made with a single stroke, which prevents it from becoming wide at the top. Pay attention to the formation of this stroke because several other letters are formed with teeth of this kind. Note that all single-stroke teeth are made with the qalam in the normal position to ensure that each has a slightly dished top. So, to form the tooth of the initial or medial form of the letter bā', start with the qalam in the normal position and set it down at the second point above the baseline. Make a short vertical stroke down to the baseline rocking the qalam into the full shallow-tip or detail position towards the end of the stroke so that the entire stroke lands flat on the baseline. Still in that position, make a short horizontal line to the left to tidy up the outline. For this form of the letter, the horizontal tail is kept extremely short in order to connect it tightly to the succeeding letters.

When using a normal pen, the body of the letter is made with a single stroke for all forms. The i'jām is made with a downward stroke, rather than a simple touch, which is all that was necessary with a qalam. →

Related letters are tā', thā', and the initial and medial forms of yā' and nūn.



The letter jīm introduces a new curvilinear aspect and several changes of direction. For the beginner, it can be made in four separate strokes of the qalam. For the more advanced calligrapher, it should be made without lifting the qalam from the page.

To make the isolated form of the letter, begin with the qalam in the normal position in order to create a nicely curved top to the tooth. Start the first stroke at the second point above the baseline. Pull the qalam in a gentle, shallow curve towards the right. As the curve descends, roll the qalam towards the shallow-tip position and continue horizontally along the baseline. For the second stroke, keep the qalam in the same position and push it back the way it came until it arrives just past the starting point of the tooth. Continue upwards, making a curve with a slightly deeper throat than the tooth. Be sure to make this stroke nearly as tall as the tooth. Raise the qalam from the page and return it to the base of the curve just made, still in the shallow-tip position. Make a hump in the curve somewhat higher than the top of the tooth rolling the qalam back to the normal position to end the stroke with a sharp "beak". For the fourth stroke, continue the curve down to the baseline, closely hugging the profile of the second stroke. Without lifting the qalam, extend the stroke just below the baseline towards the right. Be sure to maintain a hair-fine gap between the upper and lower strokes,



and end with a straight diagonal edge well before the right extremity of the letter.

Note that if you continue this last stroke past the end of the letter, that will transform it into the tail of a yā' connected to the jīm, which is useful for creating some words.

Add the i'jām under the baseline, below the tooth of the letter.

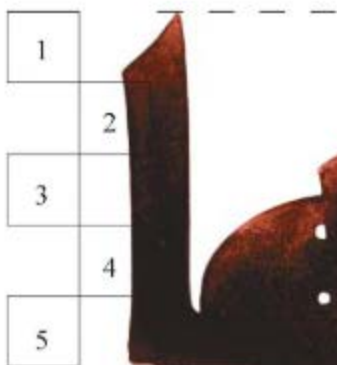
The initial and medial forms of jīm lack the tail, and the second stroke is therefore continued only as far as needed to make a close connection with the following letter. As with contemporary Arabic alphabets, the jīm can be "stacked" above the succeeding letters, including itself. So take the time to plan how far above the baseline to start. When the jīm is in the final position, its body must rest on the baseline, so remember to start the preceding letters high enough above the baseline to allow for this.

When using a normal pen, the letter is formed as with a qalam for all forms except that it can be done with a single stroke. Remember that the i'jām is made with a stroke, rather than a touch.

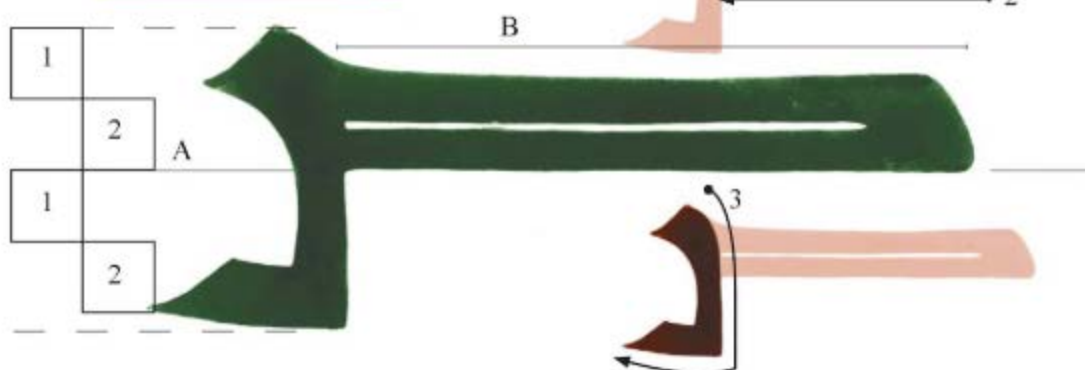


Related letters are ḥā' and khā'.



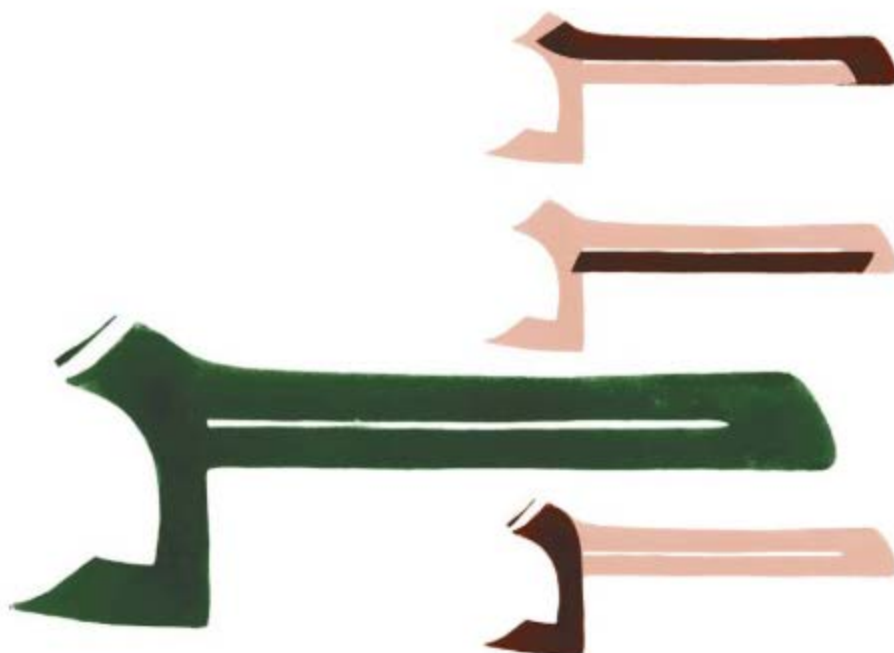


Şād Ḍād



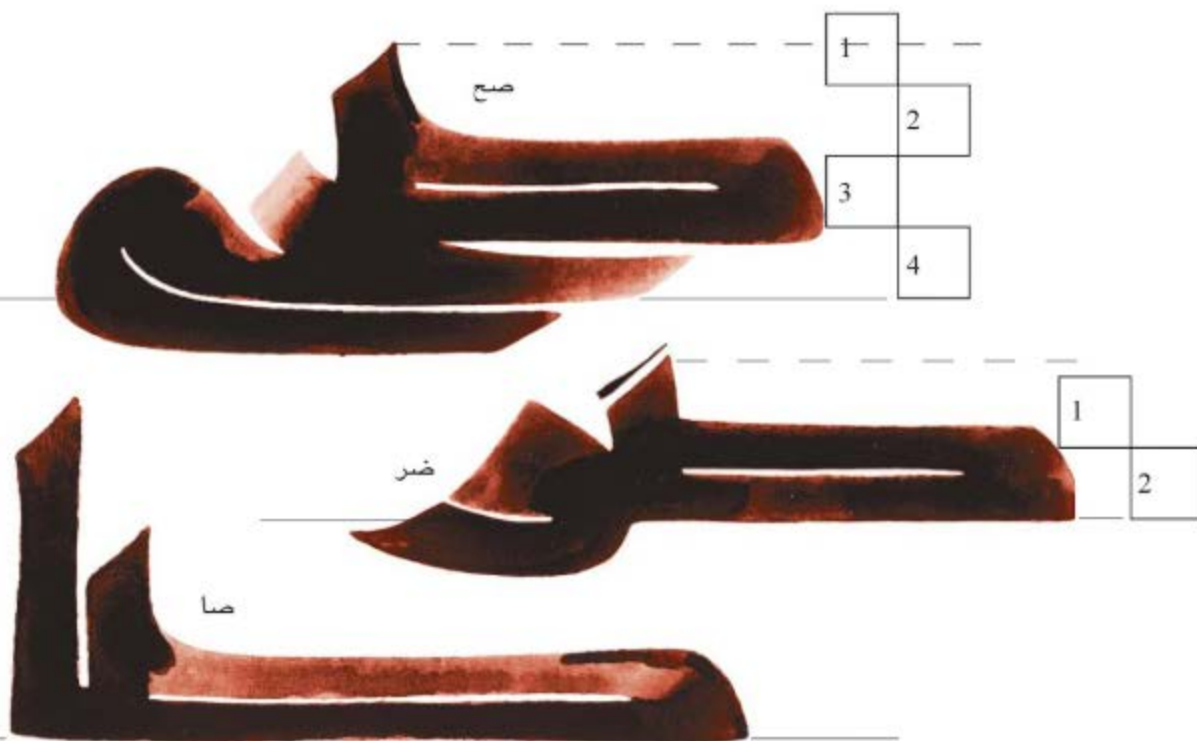
The almost rectilinear form of this letter in Primary contrasts strongly with its curvilinear form in contemporary Arabic scripts, such as Naskhi. In fact, the letter şād is a long letter: one that can be extended horizontally in accordance with the calligrapher's sense of appropriateness. Note that the curved parts of the first stroke are slightly thickened.

The isolated form of the letter is made from three separate strokes. Begin the



first stroke at the second point above the baseline, with the qalam in the normal position. Scoop the line slightly downwards while rolling the qalam a little towards the shallow-tip position. Continue the stroke to the right as far as seems good to you. Stop, and without lifting the qalam from the page, roll it on the spot into the medium shallow-tip position, then make a short wide downward curve to meet the baseline. While making this downward curve, widen it by rolling the qalam so that it arrives at the baseline in the full shallow-tip position. Slide the qalam sideways to the left to make a short horizontal mark. The second stroke will be narrower than the first. For this stroke, lift the qalam from the page and roll it back towards the medium shallow-tip position. Set it back on the page at the end of the previous stroke and push it leftwards exactly on the baseline until it approaches the starting point of the first stroke. Note the slender gap between the two horizontal strokes. As we have said, maintaining the accuracy and clarity of this gap is a mark of the calligrapher's skill.

The third stroke forms a cup at the end of the letter. It is quite a complex set of movements and will need practice. For this stroke, lift the qalam from the page and return it to the full normal position to ensure that you begin with a nicely curved top. Now set it just above the starting point of the first stroke and make



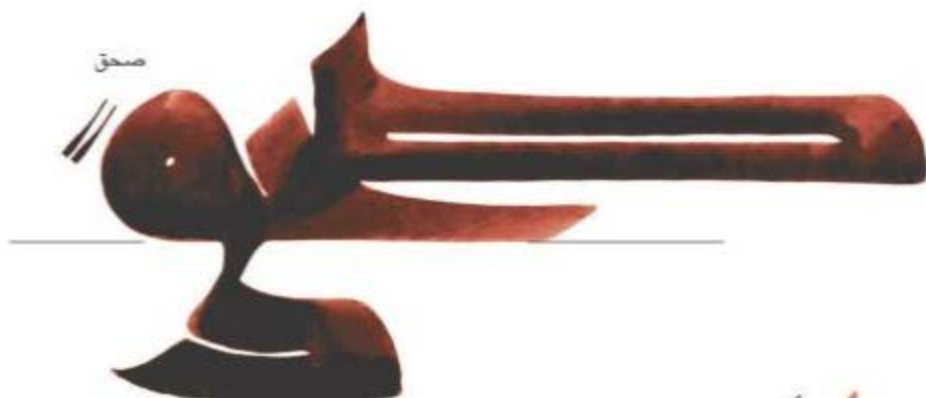
previous stroke. Draw it to the left, closely hugging the stroke just made and allowing the stroke to widen slightly as it goes. End with an elegantly curved tip that aligns with the “neck” of the letter.

Add two iʿjām close to the upper left of the head.

The initial and medial forms of the letter are like those of the letter fāʾ. Remember to differentiate them clearly with the correct iʿjām. Add two iʿjām close to the head of the letter qāf.

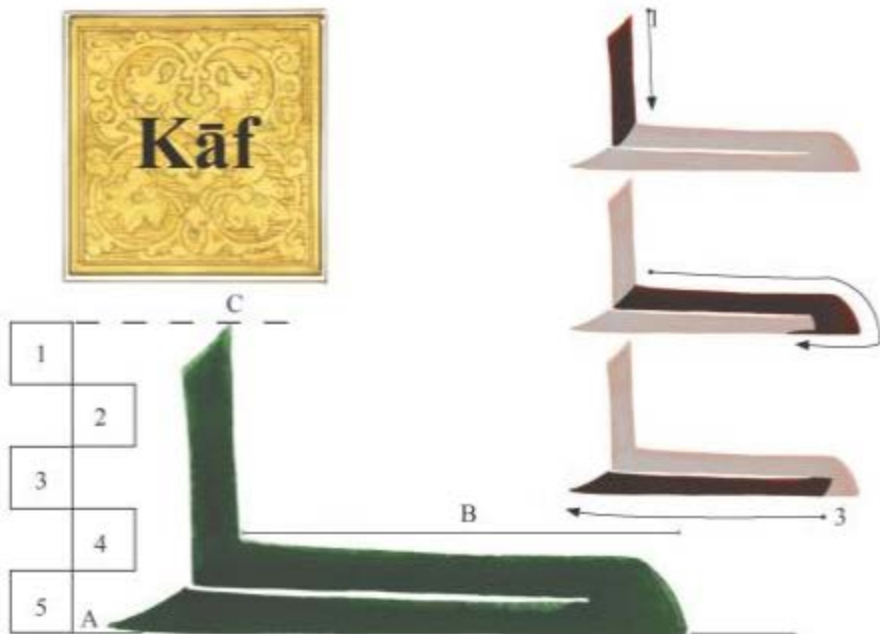
The final form of the letter is like the isolated form. Set it to abut the previous letter or its connector as closely as possible. Consider the word صَعِقَ.

When using a normal pen, the letter is formed as with a qalam except that it can be done with a single stroke. Remember to make the two iʿjām with a stroke and to add the dot at the center of the head.



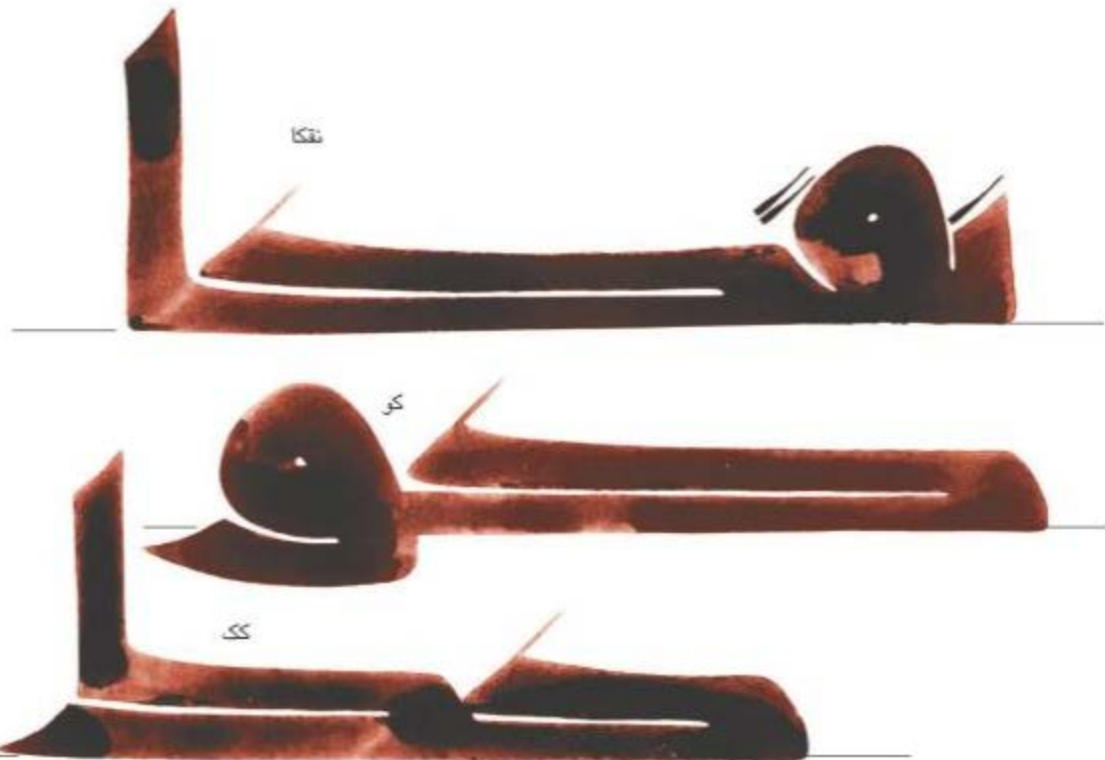
يَقْحَضِقِي





The letter kāf is one of those whose appearance is rather different from the way it looks in contemporary Arabic scripts, such as Naskhi. It is one of the long letters, and in Primary Kufic its isolated form can easily be mistaken for a tā', from which it differs only in that the stem connects to its lower horizontal line, so be sure to look for this when reading and to make the difference scrupulously clear when writing. Equally, its initial and medial forms look very similar to those of the letter dāl, and can be recognized only by the fact that they join subsequent letters, where the letter dāl does not. The letter kāf uses the skills learned with the letters alif, dāl, and šād. The novice calligrapher may make the letter with three strokes, where the advanced calligrapher will only need one stroke.

To make the isolated form of the letter, start the first stroke with the qalam in the normal position five points above the baseline. This letter is as tall as the letter alif. Descend vertically four points towards the baseline and stop. The novice calligrapher may raise the qalam and set it down again, still in the normal position, to join the previous stroke. For the second stroke, pull the qalam to the right for a distance of about seven points or longer. Nuance the line by rolling the qalam towards the shallow-tip position and back to normal as the line progresses. When it is as long as seems good, rotate the qalam sharply to the full shallow-tip position and make a downward slope to the baseline. Push the qalam to the left a little way to make a clean base for the letter. For the third stroke, set the qalam down in the medium shallow-tip position at the base of the stroke just made and push it to the left until it reaches the corner of the letter, allowing the



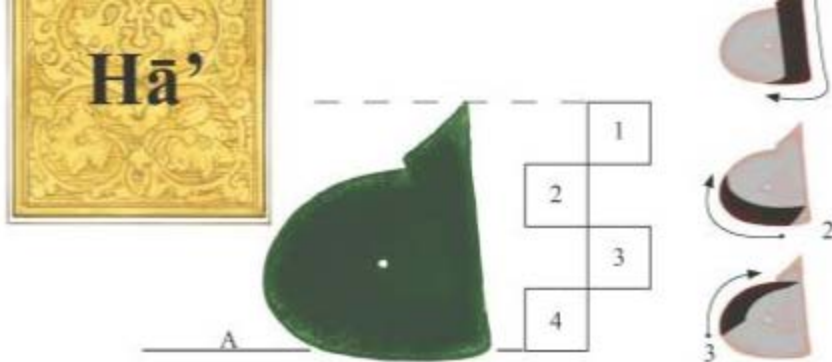
stroke to widen as it travels. Complete the stroke with an elegantly curved tip that aligns with the angle of the stem.

The initial and medial forms of the letter, are also made with three strokes. The first stroke forms a large initial serif, as for the letter dāl. For this stroke, set the qalam down in the normal position at the second point above the baseline. Slide it diagonally downwards and to the left to make the serif. The letter may then be continued as for the isolated form, in one continuous stroke or as three separate ones. Like the sub circular letters, it joins the previous letters sympathetically. Thus if the previous letter is a qāf, as in the word **قَفَا**, it will need a very short connector to keep it separate from the curved edge of the qāf. On the other hand, if the previous letter is another kāf, as in the word **كَفَا**, then the medial form can abut or even slightly overlap the previous letter, whose identity remains perfectly clear.

The final form of the letter is identical to the isolated form, and it joins the preceding letters in the same way as the medial form. Again, consider the word **كَفَا**.

When using a normal pen, the letter is formed as with a qalam except that it can be done with a single stroke.



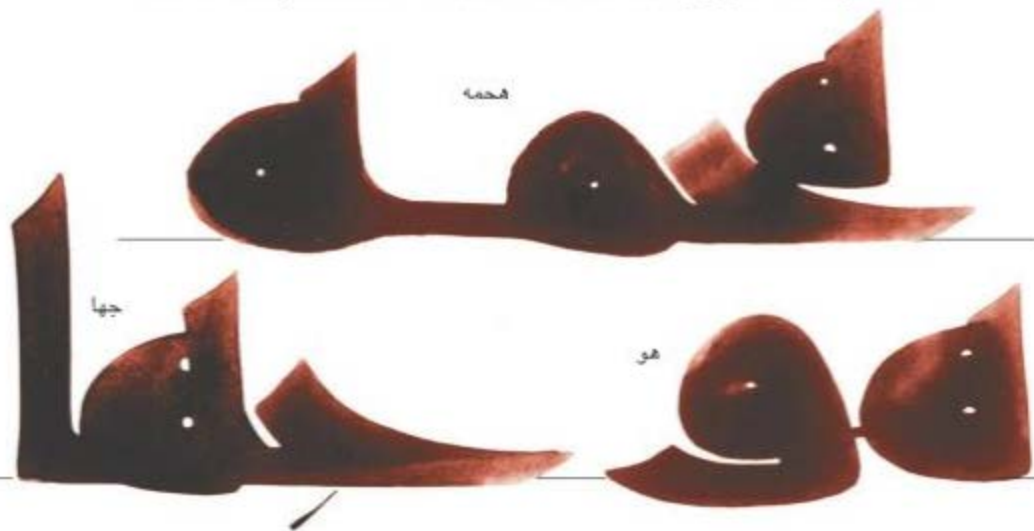


The letter hā' is one of the sub circular letters, and it is one of the most exacting letters in the Primary Kufic alphabet. It requires the calligrapher to refine to a high precision the skills learned with the letters mīm, fā', and qāf. This is because in the isolated and final forms of the letter, the body is thickened and it is therefore challenging to make a small enough pinhole space at the center. And in the initial and medial forms there are two pinhole gaps hugging the first stroke, and it is even trickier to achieve these. To control both outlines and pinholes so that this letter seems to have been made in a single flowing movement takes much practice.

If using a brush qalam, this is an especially difficult letter to achieve as the rotation of the second stroke must be especially tight, while the partially rotated third stroke must be kept close enough to the second stroke to seem continuous while leaving sufficient room for the pinhole space.

The isolated form of the letter is made with three strokes and a hidden extra stroke. For the first stroke, set the qalam down in the normal position four points above the baseline and make a straight, slightly sloping line all the way to the baseline. At the baseline, rock the qalam into the detail position and push it a little way to the left to make a clean base for the letter. Now make the hidden extra stroke that will make it possible to achieve a central pinhole space. Set the qalam down in the normal position three points above the baseline and half overlapping the first stroke. Make a parallel sloping stroke all the way to the baseline and finish it neatly with the detail position. Make the second stroke by setting the qalam down in the normal position at the base of the double stroke just made. Push it a little way to the left and begin an upward curve stopping at the second point above the baseline. For the third stroke raise the qalam and set it down again, still in the normal position, a little below the end of the curve. Continue the curve upwards and to the right until it meets the stem of the letter, three points above the baseline.


The initial form is made without the hidden stroke, but this time the second and third strokes are repeated with slightly different proportions. So, make the first stroke as for the isolated form. Now, for the second stroke set the qalam down in the normal position at the base of the stem and push it no more than one point to the left to make the upward curve, which must stop one point above the baseline. Make the third stroke as for the isolated form, setting the qalam down in the normal position on the end of the curve and bringing it to the right until it

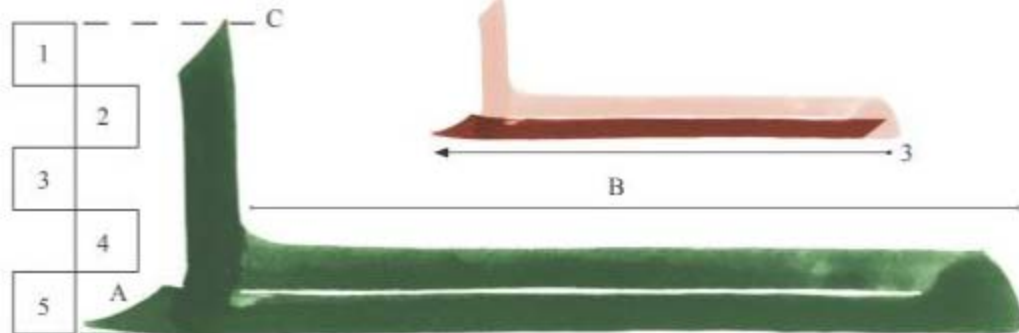


meets the stem. Be sure to leave the pinhole space close to the vertical edge of the stem. Raise the qalam and repeat the second stroke as if it was for the isolated form. So, set the qalam down in the normal position at the base of the stem and on top of the second stroke. Push it to the left about two points and make an upward curve ending about two points above the baseline. The third stroke is the same as before, but this time it is carried out in the medium shallow-tip position. So, raise the qalam and set it down again on the curve in the shallow-tip position. Take the curve upwards and to the right until it meets the stem. Be sure to keep this stroke close to the one below it but leave enough room to make the second pinhole against the vertical edge of the stem.

The medial form is exactly like the initial form except that the first stroke rises from the previous letter's connector instead of starting at the top of the letter. If the previous letter has a curved or diagonal form, like the letters *jīm* or *fā'*, the stroke should start with a curve or diagonal to echo that shape.

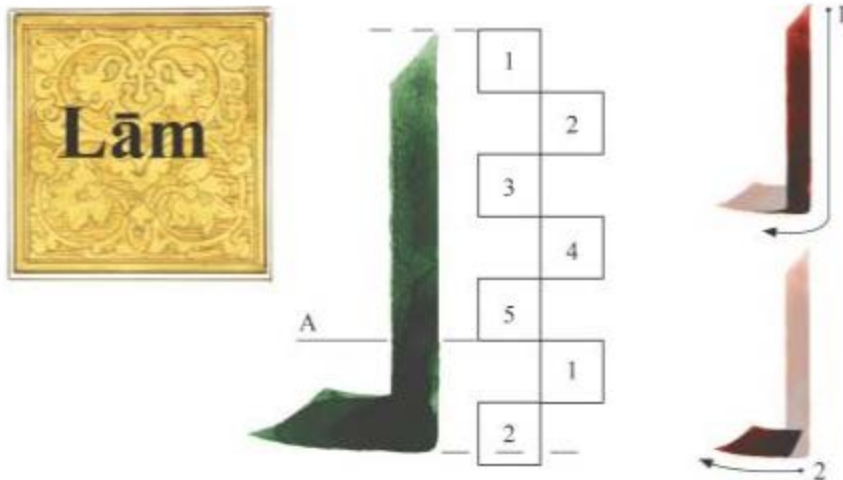
Notice that the medial and final forms of this letter can be allowed to sink through the baseline, as in the words *هـ* and *هـ*.

When using a normal pen, all forms of the letter can be done with a single stroke. Remember to add the central dot for the isolated and initial forms, and the two dots for the initial and medial forms. 



The letter ṭā' is one of those whose rectilinear form will be unfamiliar to those accustomed to contemporary Arabic scripts, such as Naskhi. It is one of the long letters, and uses the skills developed for the letters ṣād and especially kāf and dāl. It is made with three strokes, although the advanced calligrapher can reduce this to two. Visually, it is very like the isolated form of the letter kāf, and can only be told apart from it by the fact that its stem passes all the way to the baseline so that the extended horizontal body is closed at both ends, so be sure to make this difference very clear as you write and to look for it as you read.

To make the isolated and final forms of the letter, set the qalam down in the normal position five points above the baseline (it will therefore be as tall as the letter alif). Make the first stroke by drawing the qalam vertically all the way to the baseline. For the second stroke, set the qalam down on the stem in the normal position two points above the baseline. Bring the qalam downwards half a point while making a curve to the right. Without raising the qalam, extend the stroke seven to ten points to the right, or more. When the stroke is as long as seems good, rotate the qalam into the full shallow-tip position and make a downward slope to the baseline. Then slide the qalam a little way to the left to make a clean angle for the letter. For the third stroke, raise the qalam and set it down in a shallow-to-normal position at the end of the stroke just made. Push the qalam all the



The letter lām is very similar to its form in contemporary Arabic scripts, such as Naskhi, although it is more angular. In Primary Kufic, this letter can be like a mirror image of the letter alif, which gives it useful symbolic design potential. However, this similarity could also confuse the reader, so there is a special ligature to ensure absolute clarity when the letter lām is followed by an alif, as we shall see.

To make the isolated form of the letter, start the first stroke by setting the qalam down in the normal position five points above the baseline. Draw a vertical line down through the baseline and continue for two more points (so the line is seven points long in total). As it reaches the end, rock the qalam into the detail position and draw a thin line a little way to the left to create a clean angle and base for the letter. For the second stroke, raise the qalam and set it down in the normal position at the base of the stem. Push it two points to the left and a little upwards, ending with a nicely curved tip. Note that the form of the letter below the baseline is very similar to the final form of the letter nūn. Be sure to differentiate these: the nūn extends two and a half points below the baseline, while the lām only extends two points.

The stem of the initial form of the letter stops at the baseline. To make this form of the letter, start the first stroke in the normal position five points above the baseline. Take the stroke all the way to the baseline and stop there. Rock the qalam into the detail position and push it a little way to the left to make a clean angle and base for the letter. For the second stroke, raise the qalam and set it down in the normal position at the base of the stem. Push it a little to the left to start the connector.

The medial form looks just like the initial form except that it abuts the connector of the previous letter. However, if the previous letter has a curved or diagonal form, like the letters jīm or fā', the medial lam can be written upwards as



a smooth continuation of the connector. In this case, the transition should echo the curve or diagonal of the previous letter, as in the word قلى.

The final form can also be written from the top downwards, or from the connector upwards, depending on the shape of the previous letter. It looks exactly like the isolated form of the letter, except that it abuts or develops smoothly from the preceding letter's connector, as in the word لقد.

When using a normal pen, the letter is formed exactly as with a qalam.



