



Reflections of a Current Hifz Student

By Safiyyah Shakir

Surah Fatiha

In the Name of Allah—the Most Compassionate, Most Merciful.

All praise is for Allah—Lord of all worlds

the Most Compassionate, Most Merciful,

Master of the Day of Judgment.

You ‘alone’ we worship and You ‘alone’ we ask for help.

Guide us along the Straight Path,

the Path of those You have blessed—not those You are displeased with, or those who are astray.

Background:

I am 26 years old living with my parents in Chicago, Illinois. I am the second oldest of six kids (four boys and two girls) and I have been a beginner's Quran reading and memorization teacher for ten years.

My teaching journey started in 2012. I was a part-time teacher's assistant in the early childhood classroom at my local Masjid's weekend school. My mother was the head of the classroom from 2012 until 2017. She was moved to another classroom, teaching young girls between the ages of 10 and 18 Islamic Studies. I was promoted to head teacher of her classroom where I taught until the 2020 COVID shut down.

Later that same year, due to high demand from the parents of my former students, I started Shakir Institute of Islamic Learning. It is an online Quran reading and memorization platform.

In Ramadan 2022, I enrolled in the Qaida Noorania course taught by Al Furqaan Group and gained my Ijazah two months later. One of my biggest aspirations is to open up the first Islamic school on the Southside of Chicago.

Juz Amma Part One: A Mother's Efforts

I am going to be mentioning my mother a lot in this presentation. Her efforts are what got me started on my journey to becoming a Hafidtha of the Quran. May Allah forgive her of all of her sins and grant her the highest place in Jannah for her efforts.

My mother used to play Quran while I was in the womb. During my infancy, she would play the Quran to help me fall asleep and keep me calm. When I was around 4, she taught me how to read my Arabic letters. By the age of 6, she'd taught me how to read arabic and several surah (Surah Faitha and Surah Naas to Surah Ghashiyah).

My parents wanted their children to have a connection with the Quran. They dreamed of having either some or all of their children become Hafidth of Quran. So my father found a Quran teacher who could continue where my mother had left off. He found a teacher who was the Imam of a small masjid named Masjid Al Farooq. Imam Ousmane Drame soon became another person instrumental in helping me gain a love for memorizing the Quran.

Imam Ousmane didn't complete my memorization of Juz Amma. Instead he thought it would be best to start from the beginning of the Quran and continue to the end. So we started memorizing Surah Al Baqarah. However, I did manage to complete Juz Amma by myself. The story of how that happened will be in part 2.

Surah Baqarah and Surah Ali - Imran

It took me four years to memorize Surah baqarah. During that process, Imam Ousmane also began to teach me the rules of Tajweed. Of course, as a child, I pretended to pay attention and found everything else interesting. However, my amazing mother, ever the studious one, took notes, asked questions, and made sure her own reading was up to par. That meant that during the week, Tajweed was part of our daily Quran sessions with her.

Thanks to our lessons with Imam Ousmane, my mother improved her own Quran reading just so she could listen to myself and my siblings when it came time to review our old lesson and perfect our new lesson. She woke us up after Fajr to study, carved out time in the afternoon for our review, and made time in the evening to listen to us after her daily duties were completed. May Allah forgive her of all of her sins and grant her the highest place in Jannah for her efforts.

Between my mother's efforts during the week, and my teacher's efforts on weekends, I was able to do many things. I participated in my first Quran competition, recited at my local Masjid's 1st annual fundraiser, and became the person sisters asked to lead prayers at gatherings. I also completed my memorization of Surah Baqarah and up to juz 4 in Surah Ali - Imran. We stopped learning with him due to his increasingly busy schedule as an imam. Yet my Hizf journey didn't stop there.

Completing Surah Ali - Imran and My First Khatam

While I don't remember her name, I do remember that my next teacher after Imam Ousmane was Palestinian. She helped me complete Surah Ali - Imran. Unfortunately we had to stop classes with her as she was pregnant and had a young son.

A few months later, we had an online teacher named Muhammad Aslam in Pakistan. I was 13 years old when we started with him. With him I stopped my Hifz and instead I completed my first Khatam. This means I read the entire Quran from front to back in Arabic. After completing my first Khatam, things began to go downhill.

I took advantage of the fact that this was an online class. He couldn't see if I was reading from the Mushaf or not. To get through my lessons, I read my review and read what I was supposed to memorize. Ya Allah the amount of Quran I could have memorized in that time had I not decided to be sneaky. I pray that Allah forgives me for my ill use of time and poor decision making.

Juz Amma Part Two: Healthy Competition

Now, I cannot remember the exact time frame that I completed Juz Amma. I can only remember my mother asking me if I knew Surah Tariq and Surah Buruj. She had taught my younger brother (the first of three) Surah Tariq and Buruj. I said no and this fire inside of me lit up.

MY BROTHER WAS NOT GOING TO BEAT ME!!!!

I buckled down and got to work. Soon I had completed Juz Amma. Sometimes a sibling getting temporarily getting ahead of you is all the push you need to keep on going. And yes, I won :)

Completing Juz 29 and Surah Nisaa:

For seven months, I attended an Islamic school in a neighboring town with my sister and two younger brothers. Attending that school was both a blessing and a trial. I was blessed with a teacher who helped me perfect my memorization of Juz Amma and complete my memorization of Juz 29. She also helped me learn Surah Dhariyat and complete my review of all the other Surah that I already knew.

Unfortunately, the trials of attending the school overcame the benefit. We completed the school year and left. Allah is the best of planners. Masjid Al Farooq, our local Masjid, had started a Hifz program for boys. I wanted to join, so after talking with the two Imam's, I was allowed to join the program as well. My new teacher was Imam Ousmane Tounkara. With his guidance, I again re-mastered my old lessons and learned all of Surah Nisaa and the first few pages of Surah Ma'idah. I stopped after several months due to me getting ready to graduate High school.

I went back to the teacher online but old habits crept up immediately. Not wanting to go back to my old ways and also adjusting to college, I stopped my Hifz all together. It would five years before I made an attempt to re-start my hifz.

Why is it important for you to Memorize the Quran?

We all know that part of our duties as being a muslim is to make sure that the Quran is an essential part of our everyday lives. My own personal reason for reading Quran is not only fulfill that duty but to also use this journey as a form of repentance.

For a long time I'd lost the feeling of having a small connection to the Quran. Now, I am after something bigger and deeper then just reciting the Arabic verses and reading the English text.

I want to gain a relationship with the Holy Book that my Lord sent down as a guiding light for myself and my fellow Muslim brothers and sisters.

Was Reading the Tafsir Part of Your Journey?

Reading the Tafsir was not part of my journey early on. In all honesty it still isn't. I do not feel like I am at the level of being able to try and comprehend the lessons in the Tafsir. I am still trying to complete reading the Quran in English for the yWhen I started the Taddabur classes with Ustadha Umm Zakiyyah, that was my first time taking a deep dive into learning the stories and lessons behind each aya of the Quran. It is these lessons that re-started my drive for memorizing the Quran.

Where I Am Now:

For a short time in 2022, I had another Hifz teacher. However, finances and personal matters hindered my lessons. After a lot of reflection, I realized that Allah was speaking to me through these trials. Part of my Hifz journey is also correcting some wrongs that I had done. That came first before trying to start memorizing again. I was also setting unrealistic goals for myself yet again.

Instead of trying to take a year and three months to memorize, I am giving myself three years to complete my memorization. First I am starting with perfecting my old Surah yet again. I am also in the process of reading the Quran in English from front to back for the first time. I am in a five month class that is giving an indepth look at 5 surah in Juz 27 (Surah An - Najm, Surah Al Qamar, Surah Ar - Rahman, Surah Al - Wa'qiah, and Surah Al - Hadid).

My journey with the Quran is one of ups and downs, lots of laughs, and lots of tears. I have funny memories of this journey and sad memories as well. All in all, the journey of getting closer to Allah through the Quran is one of beauty and purification and I pray that when I meet my Lord, He is pleased with my efforts from the past, the present, and the future.

Dua for My Beloved Soul Tribe

“Ya Allah. You are the King of kings, the Most Compassionate, Most Merciful. Ya Allah you are the only one who has knowledge of all things. Grant us the ability to be grateful for the knowledge you have given us and the ability to do right by that knowledge. Allow us to grow closer to you and gain a deeper understanding of your Holy Book.

Every sister here is on their own beautiful journey with the Quran. Ya Allah please let your book be a guide, a healing, and a connector between you and each of your beloved servants here in this conference. Ya Allah make this conference a means of bringing us all closer to you and a deed that weighs on all scales. You are the King of kings, The All - Knowing, Most kind, and Merciful.”