

Methodologies of Hadith Scholars in Dealing with Hadiths of Encouragement and Warning Between Leniency and Rigor: A Comparative Critical Hadith Study

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Abstract: This study examines the methodologies of hadith scholars in dealing with reports of encouragement and warning and analyzes the boundary between regulated leniency in transmitting or acting upon certain weak reports and blameworthy leniency that allows fabricated material to enter preaching, worship, and religious memory. The research problem arises from differing interpretations of the early statement that scholars were lenient in reports concerning virtues. One approach understood it as relaxing isnad requirements outside doctrine and legal rulings while preserving criticism; another treated it as broad permission to transmit anything that softens the heart or encourages good; while strict scholars maintained that recommendation is a legal ruling and that attributing a specific virtue or quantified reward to the Prophet or Imam requires reliable evidence. The study employs inductive, analytical, comparative, and applied methods and compares Sunni discussions with the Imami treatment of the reports of Man Balagh and the principle of leniency in evidence for recommended practices. The study concludes that the dispute is not a simple binary between accepting and rejecting weak reports. It concerns four spheres: transmission, individual precautionary practice, legal ruling of recommendation, and public dissemination through categorical attribution. Careful advocates of leniency exclude fabricated reports and generally require non-severe weakness, inclusion under an established principle, absence of categorical belief in the attribution, and absence of conflict with decisive evidence. Strict scholars argue that these conditions either move the report into corroborated evidence or make the general principle—not the weak report—the actual basis of practice. Imami discussions of Man Balagh likewise include interpretations ranging from relaxation of evidentiary requirements to a secondary recommendation or merely a promise of reward for compliant adherence. The study proposes a seven-stage model: identify the report's function; trace and collect its routes; assess the severity of weakness; examine the text; test its relation to an established principle; select the appropriate transmission formula; and assess the consequences of circulation. The study concludes that the fairest position is neither to equate weak reports with fabricated reports nor to treat virtues exactly like legal rulings in every respect, but to construct a graduated circulation policy whose rigor increases as a report moves from private hope to public teaching, habitual ritual, quantified reward, or categorical attribution to revelation.

Keywords: Reports of Encouragement and Warning, Weak Hadith, Fabricated Hadith, Virtues of Deeds, Leniency in Evidence for Recommended Practices, Akhbar Man Balagh, Hadith Criticism, Methodologies of Hadith Scholars.

Introduction

The discourse of encouragement and warning (al-targhīb wa-al-tarhīb) constitutes one of the patterns of hadith most closely linked to daily human life. It is pervasively present in sermons, admonitions, works

of renunciation and soft-heartedness (al-zuhd wa-al-raqā'iq), assemblies during the months of Ramadan and Muḥarram, social media posts, and prayer booklets. Its efficacy lies in the fact that it does not merely inform the recipient of a legal ruling, but rather constructs an emotional and psychological motive toward it: it promises a specific reward, depicts scenes of Paradise, warns against punishment, or links a modest deed to an immense recompense. This pedagogical function explains the high demand for this genre of reports, but it simultaneously accounts for its acute vulnerability to fabrication and exaggeration. A fabricator can easily drive people toward a objective he deems righteous through an evocative phrasing attributed to the Lawgiver [1].

Early critical tradition recognized this danger at an early stage. Critics noted that among the primary motivations for fabrication was the intent to encourage good and warn against evil. They recorded that certain ascetics lied 'seeking divine reward' (ḥisbatan), mistakenly believing that lying for the Prophet—rather than against him—was permissible if it impelled people toward obedience. Hadith scholars vigorously responded that nobility of purpose does not transform forgery into legitimate divine revelation, and that the severe warning against falsely attributing statements to the Prophet encompasses every deliberate attribution. Concurrently, it was transmitted from a group of leading Imams that they applied stringent standards in matters of the lawful and prohibited (al-ḥalāl wa-al-ḥarām) while exhibiting leniency in reports concerning virtues (al-faḍā'il). The convergence of these two discourses raised a precise academic question: How could a critic display leniency in a domain explicitly targeted by fabricators? Was 'leniency' a descriptive term for abandoning critical scrutiny altogether, or for altering the threshold of evidentiary reliance and the formula of transmission? [2]

Addressing this question necessitates disentangling several concepts that have become conflated in homiletic practice: a weak hadith (al-ḥadīth al-ḍa'īf) is not synonymous with a fabricated one (al-mawḍū'); leniency does not imply authentication (taṣḥīḥ); acting out of hope for reward (al-'amal rajā'an) is not equivalent to issuing a formal legal decree of recommendation (al-fatwā bi-al-istiḥbāb); transmitting a report using a passive formula of uncertainty (ṣīghat al-tamrīd) is distinct from attributing it assertively to the Prophet or an Imam; and acting upon an established general principle does not prove the specific count, timing, modality, or specified reward mentioned in a weak report. Without these precise distinctions, academic debate degenerates into simplistic slogans: 'weak reports are acted upon in virtues' versus 'weak reports are rejected absolutely,' whereas actual analytical applications are far broader and more subtle than either slogan [3].

This issue assumes heightened urgency within the contemporary digital environment. Historically, a weak report in a specialized reference work was contextualized by an introduction, technical symbols, and textual criticism (takhrīj). Today, digital graphics extract the matn (text) entirely from its scholarly framework, place 'The Messenger of Allah said' or 'The Imam said' underneath it, and disseminate it thousands of times. Consequently, the function of transmission and its potential for harm are radically altered. A methodology that might tolerate mentioning a weak report to an advanced student of knowledge alongside an explicit clarification of its weakness does not necessarily tolerate transforming it into a mass public ritual. Hence, this study seeks to reconstruct the methodologies of hadith scholars as a multi-stage policy for managing prophetic reports, rather than a single binary judgment upon them.

Research Problem

The central problem of this research lies in the absence of a comprehensive framework that defines the exact boundaries of leniency in hadiths of encouragement and warning and distinguishes it rigorously from the acceptance of fabrications. Generalized classical expressions, shifting terminology between early and late scholars, and the transition of material from isnād-based compendia to popular preaching have all contributed to expanding the scope of confusion. This research originates from a primary overarching question: What are the methodologies of hadith scholars in transmitting, practicing upon, and publicly disseminating hadiths of encouragement and warning, and what is the precise dividing line between advocates of leniency and proponents of rigor?

From this main question, the following sub-questions branch out:

- What is the critical distinction between weak (ḍa'īf), rejected (munkar), and fabricated (mawḍū') reports in the domain of virtues?
- What did early critics intend by 'leniency in isnād,' and did they mean 'weak' according to the formalized terminology of later scholars?

- What are the explicit conditions established by the permitting trend, and what are the core arguments of the prohibiting trend?
- How did scholars such as al-Mundhirī categorize the varying degrees of reports of encouragement and warning?
- What is the position of the 'reports of attainment' (akhbār man balagh) and the principle of leniency in the proofs of recommended acts (qā'idat al-tasāmuḥ fī adillat al-sunan) within Imami hadith theory and jurisprudence?
- Does the scholarly ruling on individual transmission differ from private practice, formal legal fatwa, and mass public dissemination?
- How can a researcher prevent the infiltration of fabricated reports without extinguishing the pedagogical function of acceptable reports?

Research Hypotheses

This study is grounded upon four central hypotheses:

1. Leniency among early hadith critics was a relative relaxation in the conditions of transmission and contextual usage, rather than an abrogation of the fundamental rules of truthfulness and verification.
2. The vast majority of scholarly disagreement arises from failing to separate the establishment of the 'general origin of an act' from establishing its 'specific modalities, count, and quantified reward.'
3. Both Sunni and Imami intellectual traditions unanimously prohibit fabricated reports, despite differing in the jurisprudential foundations that justify hope of divine reward.
4. The criteria for public dissemination must be significantly more stringent than those applied to private individual practice, because the impact of error shifts from the personal conscience of the practitioner to the construction of public religious consciousness.

Significance of the Research

Its significance stems from the double-edged nature of error in this domain: ungrounded rigor may deprive believers of a authentic admonition or a spiritual meaning supported by general principles, while uncritical leniency may attribute to revelation that which the Lawgiver never uttered, thereby constructing unfounded acts of worship, historical narratives, and collective identities.

Research Objectives

1. To clarify the concept of leniency in reports of encouragement and warning.
2. To map the major methodological trends among Hadith scholars.
3. To analyze the conditions governing lenient and rigorous orientations.
4. To identify points of convergence beneath differing scholarly terminology.
5. To test these methodologies against practical Hadith examples.
6. To propose a modern mechanism for dealing with circulating reports.

Methodology

This research uses a qualitative, library-based design combining inductive, analytical, comparative, critical, and applied methods. The inductive stage collects representative discussions of weak reports, virtues of deeds, encouragement and warning, and akhbār man balagh from Sunni and Imami primary sources. The analytical stage distinguishes the functions of transmission, private practice, formal legal recommendation, and public dissemination, while the comparative stage identifies points of convergence and divergence between the two traditions. The critical and applied stages test these principles against selected devotional, homiletic, and historical examples.

The research corpus is purposively limited to works directly addressing Hadith criticism, weak reports, fabricated reports, virtues, leniency, and the jurisprudential principle of recommended practices. Documents are examined through five procedures: identifying the function of each report, tracing its transmission context, grading the severity of weakness as reported by critics, comparing the legal implications assigned to weak evidence, and evaluating the likely consequences of public circulation. No empirical participants or statistical tests are involved; the unit of analysis is the scholarly argument and its application to selected reports. The study therefore aims at methodological reconstruction rather than authentication of every narration contained in the cited compendia.

Literature Review

Classical Sunni scholarship developed the principal framework for discussing weak reports in virtues and

admonition. Al-Nawawī permitted the cautious use of non-fabricated weak reports in faḍā'il while maintaining a clear distinction between weak and forged material [4]. Al-Sakhāwī later systematized the conditions commonly associated with Ibn Ḥajar, especially non-severe weakness, subsumption under an established principle, and the absence of definitive belief in attribution [5].

A second strand focuses on the legal function of a weak report rather than merely its transmission. Ibn Taymiyya argued that weak reports may describe an estimated reward for an act whose legitimacy is already established, but they should not independently create a new religious ruling [6]. Al-Mundhirī's Al-Targhīb wa-al-Tarhīb provides an applied model of graded transmission in which technical wording and source indications help readers distinguish stronger reports from weaker ones [7].

Critical scholarship also emphasizes the risks of expanding leniency beyond its original limits. Al-Suyūṭī's discussion of Hadith grading illustrates the need to distinguish severe weakness from outright fabrication and cautions against overinclusive judgments of mawḍū' [8]. In contrast, al-Albānī represents a more rigorous modern position that prioritizes authenticated material and criticizes the practical slippage that may occur when weak reports are routinely used in preaching [9].

The debate is further shaped by the principle that religious practice cannot be structured through unverified details. Al-Shāṭibī's treatment of innovation supports caution toward devotional forms whose fixed times, counts, or structures lack reliable proof [10]. Ibn Ḥajar's analysis of reports concerning Rajab likewise demonstrates how general virtues cannot automatically validate a specifically structured ritual or an extraordinary quantified reward [11].

Within Imami scholarship, the debate is anchored in the reports of man balagh. Al-Kulaynī transmits reports promising reward to a person who acts after receiving a report of merit, even if the original attribution is not ultimately established [12]. Al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī organizes related narrations within the jurisprudential discussion of recommended acts, making these reports central to later formulations of leniency in the proofs of sunnan [13].

Modern Imami analysis does not interpret these reports uniformly. Al-Khoei argues that akhbār man balagh do not establish a formal ruling of recommendation but instead support reward for compliant or precautionary action [14]. Earlier Imami Hadith theory, represented by al-Mīr Dāmād, preserves a distinction between weak and fabricated reports while allowing controlled engagement with non-authentic material in appropriate contexts [15].

Recent Persian scholarship has refined the jurisprudential dimensions of the debate. Fazel Lankarani examines the doctrinal scope of the principle of leniency and its implications for recommended practices [16], while Nikkhah Amiri and Norouzian analyze the principle specifically through the interpretive possibilities of akhbār man balagh [17]. These studies show that the controversy concerns the legal effect assigned to weak evidence, not simply whether such reports may be mentioned.

Other studies focus on historical development and practical consequences. Jafari, Sharifi Isfahani, and Delafkar investigate factors that contributed to the emergence of lenient approaches [18]. Farahani demonstrates the risks of transferring jurisprudential leniency into the transmission of Ashura narratives, where historical truth claims require independent verification [19].

Comparative and applied studies have also widened the field. Delbari and Mohaqeq Garafmi examine Sunni and Imami interaction with reports on the virtues of Qur'anic chapters [20]. Al-Khashin directly studies the relationship between leniency and the infiltration of fabricated reports [21], while al-Māmaqānī provides technical foundations in Imami dirāyah for evaluating narrators and reports [22]. Discussions of specific devotional practices, such as Faḍlallāh's treatment of Ṣalāt al-Raghā'ib, further illustrate the need to separate general devotional permissibility from verified attribution of structured rituals [23].

The present study is positioned at the intersection of these strands. Rather than asking only whether a weak Hadith may be acted upon, it reconstructs the complete life cycle of a report across four spheres: transmission, private precautionary practice, formal legal ruling, and public dissemination. It also compares Sunni conditional frameworks with Imami readings of akhbār man balagh and extends the debate to digital circulation, where repeated decontextualized transmission can transform a weak report into an assumed public Sunnah. This positioning provides the conceptual basis for the seven-stage critical model developed later in the article.

Research Structure

The article is organized into three chapters. Chapter One establishes the conceptual and historical

foundations of leniency and rigor in Hadith transmission. Chapter Two presents the principal results through Imami analysis, boundaries of permissible leniency, applied models, and Sunni-Imami comparison. Chapter Three discusses the implications of those results and develops a seven-stage critical model for scholarly and public handling of reports of encouragement and warning.

Chapter One: Conceptual Foundations, Historical Roots, and Methodologies of Hadith Scholars

Section One: Conceptual Framework

1. Encouragement and Warning as Rhetorical Functions

Encouragement (*al-targhīb*) consists of impelling the addressee toward an action by mentioning an immediate or deferred desirable outcome, whereas warning (*al-tarhīb*) consists of impelling them to abstain from an act by mentioning a disagreeable consequence or punishment. Both functions may converge in a single report that balances the reward of obedience against the consequence of sin. Not every hadith concerning virtues belongs to encouragement in the narrowest sense; a report might describe the excellence of a person or place without an explicit command, yet the description itself constructs a psychological motive. Consequently, genres of virtues (*faḍā'il*), renunciation (*zuhd*), heart-softening reports (*raqā'iq*), and homiletics (*mawā'iz*) overlap substantially with compendia of encouragement and warning.

The textual material within this domain is not uniform in status. It includes authentic Quranic verses and sound hadiths regarding foundational acts of obedience; fair (*ḥasan*) reports in themselves or through corroboration; mildly weak reports capable of being supported; severely weak reports; and blatantly fabricated reports. Furthermore, text-signification varies: a report may encourage charity in general, or it may specify a particular charity on a specific night with a fixed count, promising the forgiveness of thousands of years of sins. As specific details accumulate, the requirement for rigorous proof increases proportionately, since the general principle approving charity cannot validate specific counts, times, or extraordinary quantified rewards.

2. The Weak, the Rejected, and the Fabricated Hadith

A weak hadith (*al-ḥadīth al-ḍa'if*) is any report that lacks one or more conditions of acceptance, such as continuity of transmission (*ittiṣāl al-sanad*), uprightness of the narrator (*'adālah*), precision (*ḍabt*), or freedom from subtle defects (*'ilal*) and irregularity (*shudhūdh*). Its spectrum is vast: an *irsāl* (hurried transmission) by a renowned jurist is not equivalent to a narrative by a liar, nor is a minor memory lapse equivalent to an accusation of fabrication. A fabricated hadith (*al-mawḍū'*), by contrast, is a forged invention falsely attributed to an infallible authority. Transmitting it is strictly unlawful for anyone aware of its status, except when accompanied by explicit warning, because transmitting it assertively makes one a participant in spreading falsehood.

The term 'rejected' (*al-munkar*) is applied by critics to several meanings, most commonly when a weak narrator single-handedly contradicts trustworthy authorities; it is also used to describe a text whose contents are egregiously anomalous. It serves as an alert zone rather than an automatic judgment of fabrication, as anomaly may stem from delusion, interpolation (*idrāj*), or reversal (*qalb*). Among the most critical analytical errors is converting a judgment of 'weak' into 'fabricated' without evidence, or conversely, treating a narrator accused of lying as having mere light weakness. Legitimate leniency—according to its proponents—operates strictly within certain upper strata of weak reports and never crosses into the realm of fabrication.

3. The Multiple Meanings of Leniency

Leniency (*al-tasāmuh* / *al-tasāhul*) possesses four distinct meanings that must be carefully uncoupled:

1. Leniency in *isnād*: Accepting a chain of transmission below the standard of authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) for the purpose of consideration or secondary support (*al-i'tibār wa-al-shawāhid*).
2. Leniency in transmission: Mentioning a report using passive or uncertain phrasing that refrains from asserting definitive provenance.
3. Leniency in personal practice: Performing an act out of hope for reward (*rajā'an*) without believing the report to be certainly established.
4. Leniency in legal ruling: Formally establishing a divine recommendation (*istiḥbāb*) or disapproval (*karāhah*).

These four senses are not mutually dependent. A scholar may permit transmission while denying legal establishment, or permit personal precautionary practice while prohibiting public preaching, or strengthen

a report through corroboration so that it exits the domain of dispute entirely. Thus, citing the classical phrase 'we were lenient' without specifying the precise action to which it applies is methodologically insufficient. A critic who compiles weak chains in a chapter on virtues may intend to expose their origins or test them, not to authenticate every path.

4. Recommendation vs. Compliance out of Hope

Recommendation (*al-istiḥbāb*) is a formal legal ruling establishing that an act is requested by the Lawgiver in a non-obligatory manner. Compliance (*al-inqiyād*), however, is performing an act due to the possibility of its divine favor and out of hope of coinciding with reality. The distinction is practical and semantic: one who establishes recommendation asserts, 'This act is a Sunnah,' whereas the compliant practitioner states, 'I perform this hoping it is desired.' Some jurists interpreted the 'reports of attainment' as proof for formal recommendation, whereas others viewed them as a divine promise of reward for hopeful compliance without establishing textual issuance. This distinction serves as the fundamental key for comparing lenient and rigorous positions.

Section Two: Historical Roots of Leniency and its Resistance

Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghḏādī transmitted from ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Maḥdī and others a clear distinction between transmitting rulings of the lawful and prohibited and transmitting virtues: [1]

“When we transmit regarding the lawful and prohibited, we are stringent; but when we transmit regarding virtues and the like, we are lenient.” This maxim cannot be correctly understood outside the terminology of its era. During that period, 'acceptable hadith' encompassed what later scholars categorized as 'fair' (*ḥasan*), and scholars recorded entire chapters with their chains so that critics could analyze subtle defects. Leniency often meant descending from the highest tiers of authenticity to reports suitable for consideration, not accepting abandoned or fabricated material.

Furthermore, the maxim applied primarily to acts whose general obligation or recommendation was already firmly established. If the fundamental virtue of honesty, charity, or remembrance was verified, a weak report could be cited to intensify motivation without inventing an unprecedented form of worship. Ibn Taymiyya clarified that acting upon weak reports in virtues does not mean establishing an ungrounded recommendation, but rather transmitting the estimated reward of a project already proven lawful, provided the report is not known to be a lie [6].

2. The Expansion of Homiletic Literature

Compendia of renunciation and heart-softening reports emerged in an environment aimed at spiritual refinement. Authors compiled authentic, fair, traditional reports, alongside some weak material. Over time, texts became detached from their chains of transmission, and reports migrated into the hands of popular storytellers (*al-quṣṣāṣ*) and preachers. Hadith critics severely censured storytellers because many selected the most sensational and emotionally impactful stories, as general audiences rewarded exaggeration with rapt attention. Long chains of transmission—which historically exposed points of weakness—were systematically omitted for brevity, leaving only the provocative text.

Books on fabrications reveal that ascetism itself was a major impetus for forgery. Nūḥ ibn Abī Maryam was famously reported to have forged reports regarding the virtues of individual Quranic chapters when he observed people turning away from the Quran toward the jurisprudence of Abū Ḥanīfah and the military expeditions of Ibn Ishāq, claiming he did so 'for the sake of God.' Hadith critics cited this incident as proof that outward piety cannot substitute for faithful transmission, and that artificial encouragement alters the delicate balance of worship established by divine revelation.

3. Stringency as Protection for Attribution

In contrast, critical scholars built their methodology on the principle that religious reports are not free artistic literature. Imam Muslim opened his *Ṣaḥīḥ* with a rigorous introduction on the obligation of verification and the prohibition of transmitting from weak and suspect narrators, citing: 'It is sufficient lie for a person to narrate everything he hears.' A speaker may not invent a report himself, yet he becomes a link in the chain of falsehood if he transmits without discrimination. This warning applies with even greater force to encouragement and warning due to their high viral potential.

This stringency was not a rejection of spiritual admonition, but a demand for authentic admonition. The Quran and authentic prophetic reports are rich in promises and warnings, rendering forged material entirely redundant. Proponents of stringency rely on the principle that authentic material suffices over weak material, noting that assigning specific times, modalities, or counts constitutes a form of legislation,

and that unperceived spiritual rewards cannot be known through personal opinion. Hence, the claim 'there is no harm because it invites to good' ignores the reality that genuine religious good requires truthfulness in attribution.

Section Three: The Regulated Methodology of the Lenient Trend

1. The Domain of Leniency Excludes Fabrication

Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, al-Nawawī, and al-Suyūṭī affirmed the permissibility of transmitting weak reports—excluding fabrications—in virtues, admonitions, stories, and matters unrelated to creed or legal rulings, provided passive formulas of uncertain transmission are employed [3], [4], [8].

Al-Nawawī noted that scholars exercised leniency regarding the chains of virtues, and in his *Al-Azhkār* he included reports of varying strength while explaining their statuses. The decisive boundary remains the total exclusion of fabricated reports; no recognized critical school considers forgery permissible simply because its content encourages virtue.

Furthermore, 'unrelated to legal rulings' is not a mere formal label. A warning report may carry an implicit prohibition or condition the omission of a recommended act on a specific divine punishment, thereby approaching formal legislation. Thus, text-signification must be analyzed rather than relying solely on chapter headings. A report stating 'Whoever omits such a remembrance on such a night will be punished' is not a simple devotional reflection; it creates psychological obligation and a fixed routine, requiring rigorous criticism.

2. Ibn Hajar's Three Conditions

Al-Sakhāwī recorded from Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī three celebrated conditions for acting upon weak hadiths: [5], [11]

1. The weakness must not be severe (excluding liars, those accused of fabrication, and those who commit egregious errors).
2. The act must fall under a general established principle (al-*indirāj taḥta aṣl ʿāmm*).
3. The practitioner must not believe at the time of action that the report is definitively established, but acts out of precaution (rajāʿ an).

Some scholars added a fourth condition: that the act must not become so publicly renowned that common people mistake it for an established Sunnah. These conditions do not grant a weak report 'minor authenticity,' but rather mitigate the risks of its application. The first excludes unacceptable narrators; the second prevents the creation of ungrounded rituals; the third preserves the distinction between hope and certainty; and the fourth addresses social consequences, preventing an individual act of hope from turning into a public communal ritual.

3. Corroboration and Multiple Transmission Routes

Much of what is termed 'leniency' is in reality textual strengthening (al-*iʿtiḍād*). A report with minor weakness may be elevated to the rank of 'fair due to external support' (*ḥasan li-ghayrihi*) through independent multiple chains. If routes originate from disparate sources and do not converge on a single suspect narrator, the probability of authentic origin increases. However, a multiplicity of late books does not imply a multiplicity of independent chains; ten late sources may simply copy from a single flawed origin. Thus, analyzing pivotal narrators (al-*madār*), source chronology, and textual variations is indispensable.

Corroboration may occur through a specific text or a general principle. Yet a general principle establishes only the common denominator. If a weak report praises visiting the sick, and authentic principles establish the virtue of visiting the sick, encouragement toward the general act is permissible; however, this does not validate a specific promise of 'seventy thousand angels' or a specific hour or formula. A rigorous advocate of leniency separates the acceptable core from unverified details.

4. Formulas of Transmission

Hadith scholars carefully distinguished between assertive formulas (*ṣiḡhat al-jazm*, e.g., 'The Messenger of Allah said') and passive formulas of uncertainty (*ṣiḡhat al-tamrīd*, e.g., 'It is reported from him'). If a report is not authenticated, it is unlawful to present it using phrasing that implies certainty. This is not a secondary linguistic matter; the formula carries the transmitter's scholarly assessment. The contemporary problem is that graphic titles, images, and emotional symbols often obliterate the nuance of 'it is reported,' leading the public to assume definitive authenticity.

Therefore, reports must be accompanied by explicit, accessible explanations: 'Its chain is weak,'

'Unverified, mentioned for hopeful practice,' or 'The general meaning is correct through another proof, but this specific reward is unconfirmed.' Confining technical remarks to distant footnotes fails to fulfill scholarly responsibility to the public.

5. Al-Mundhirī's Methodology in Al-Targhīb wa-al-Tarhīb

The work of 'Abd al-'Azīm al-Mundhirī represents a major practical model. He compiled extensive material, organized it by topic, and explained his technical terminology in his introduction [7].

He employed specific terms such as 'transmitted by' (rawāhu) and 'it is reported' (ruwiya), drawing attention to authentic, fair, and contested chains, thereby balancing homiletic utility with critical awareness. However, utilizing his work requires understanding his technical key; extracting a text while omitting his symbols misrepresents his scholarly judgment.

The value of al-Mundhirī's methodology lies in refusing to treat encouragement and warning as a domain outside hadith science. Its limitation is that technical terminology alone is insufficient for non-specialist readers, and modern abridgments frequently drop source attributions altogether. Thus, modern scholarship requires stating Hadith grades in direct language, linking reports to independent chains, and avoiding blind reliance on an author's general prestige.

Section Four: The Rigorous Methodology and Its Arguments

1. Recommendation is a Formal Legal Ruling

The prohibiting trend begins from a fundamental jurisprudential premise: recommendation (al-istihbāb) is one of the five primary legal rulings (al-aḥkām al-taklīfiyyah), and attributing it to the Lawgiver requires valid proof. If a weak report cannot establish obligation or prohibition, it cannot establish recommendation or disapproval. A difference in legal compulsion does not eliminate the need for proof. Furthermore, promising unperceived spiritual rewards constitutes an assertion about God, which a preacher cannot determine independently.

Proponents of this view respond to the condition of 'falling under a general principle' by noting that if the act is already established by a sound principle, it is practiced based on that sound principle; the weak report adds only specific modalities, which remain unproven. If the virtue of remembrance is established generally, remembrance is lawful via general evidence; but claiming that a specific formula on a specific night yields a specific reward requires independent proof. Thus, if the conditions of the lenient trend are strictly applied, weak reports cease to function as independent sources of legislation.

2. Sufficiency of Authentic and Fair Reports

Rigorous scholars affirm that authenticated texts in encouragement and warning are abundantly sufficient, and that purifying them is prior to expanding weak material. Homiletic needs do not justify lowering standards of attribution, especially given authentic alternatives. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī adopted a firm stance against acting upon weak reports, criticizing the transformation of theoretical conditions into practical laxity and advocating absolute reliance on authenticated material [9].

This trend performed a major service to Hadith studies by re-evaluating celebrated compendia, even if specific detailed judgments remain subject to scholarly debate.

However, the argument of sufficiency does not resolve every problem. Mildly weak reports with corroboration may exist, as well as educational aphorisms not attributed to the Prophet, or precautionary actions that do not claim specific Sunnah status. Hence, the strength of the rigorous stance lies in protecting attribution, while its risk lies in conflating all weakness with invalidity of meaning or accusing transmitters of lying without discrimination.

3. Blocking the Means to Fabrication

Historical experience substantiates these concerns: countless fabrications entered religious practice through the door of virtues because listeners approved of the emotional content without scrutinizing chains. Warning signs of fabrication include disproportionate rewards, astronomical numbers, promises of forgiveness for thousands of years of sins for trivial acts, linking unknown practices to sacred nights, and promising Paradise while neglecting obligatory duties. Textual anomaly (al-nakārah) alone does not prove fabrication, but it imposes an absolute obligation of critical investigation.

Furthermore, a fabricated text may outwardly appear to fall under a general principle. Prayer is fundamentally lawful, but this does not validate inventing a specific 'prayer' with fabricated structures, times, and rewards. Proponents of rigor reject expanding the condition of 'general principle' into a cover for innovation. The general principle testifies to the genus of an act, not to every fabricated instance within

it.

4. Public Impact and the Mutation of Hope into Sunnah

General public audiences rarely maintain subtle legal distinctions. If a preacher persistently cites a weak report, the public perceives it as an established Sunnah and may censure those who omit it. Scholars have long warned against allowing practices based on weak reports to become so prominent that they overshadow authentic Sunnahs or create sectarian markers. This objection is socio-epistemic: evaluating public dissemination requires different criteria than evaluating an individual practitioner aware of Hadith grades.

This impact is even more severe in warnings. Weak reports can generate unhealthy anxiety or customary prohibitions, or be weaponized to condemn opposing groups. Conversely, exaggerated promises of reward can induce false complacency regarding sins. Thus, the ethical impact of a text must be thoroughly evaluated rather than assuming it 'encourages good.' Prophetic pedagogy balances hope and fear without eroding moral responsibility.

5. Critique of Unregulated Rigor

Despite the force of these arguments, unregulated rigor contains distinct errors: equating all weak reports with fabrications, eliminating concepts of corroboration (*al-i'tibār*), rejecting sound meanings solely due to a weak chain, and presenting speculative judgments as definitive consensus. Al-Suyūṭī criticized Ibn al-Jawzī for over-including reports in his *Al-Mawḍū'āt*, noting that many did not reach the level of outright forgery [8].

A precise methodology does not demand that a critic be lenient or severe as a psychological disposition, but rather that legal phrasing matches the exact weight of evidence: weak, severely weak, rejected, ungrounded, or fabricated.

Results

The analysis produced four principal results. First, classical leniency is best understood as a controlled reduction in evidentiary threshold for selected non-fabricated reports rather than an abandonment of Hadith criticism. Second, the strongest permitting formulations require non-severe weakness, an established general basis for the act, absence of categorical belief in attribution, and no contradiction with decisive evidence [5], [6]. Third, Sunni and Imami approaches substantially converge when the distinction between formal recommendation and precautionary practice is maintained, particularly in al-Khoei's reading of *akhbār man balagh* [14]. Fourth, the applied cases show that fixed ritual structures, extraordinary quantified rewards, historical claims, and public warnings demand stricter verification because a general principle cannot establish their specific details.

The applied analysis further shows that the social context of transmission materially affects the level of required rigor. A mildly weak report may be discussed in specialist scholarship with its status clearly stated, yet the same report can become misleading when converted into an unattributed sermon quotation, seasonal ritual, or viral digital graphic. The evidence therefore supports a graduated policy in which standards become stricter as a report moves from private hopeful practice to formal teaching, repeated communal use, and categorical attribution to revelation [7], [19].

Chapter Two: Precise Boundaries, Comparative Approaches, and Applied Models

Section One: The Imami Approach: *Akhbār Man Balagh* and Leniency

Al-Kulaynī and others transmitted from Imam al-Ṣādiq that if a person receives a report from the Prophet promising a specific reward for an act, and performs it, they receive that reward even if the Prophet never actually uttered it. Al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī compiled these texts under the chapter heading: 'The Recommendation of Performing Every Good Act for Which a Reward Has Been Transmitted.' [12], [13] These reports became the foundational basis for the jurisprudential principle known as 'leniency in the proofs of recommended acts' (*qā'idat al-tasāmuh fi adillat al-sunan*).

The expression 'projected/lawful act' in chapter headings is significant; it restricts expansion, excluding acts known to be invalid or conflicting with established evidence. Furthermore, attaining divine reward is not equivalent to establishing textual issuance; the text itself explicitly assumes the possibility that the Prophet never spoke it. Thus, even under the broadest interpretation, these reports do not convert a weak chain into an authentic one, nor do they license assertive attribution.

2. The View Establishing Secondary Recommendation

A dominant group of traditional jurists maintained that akhbār man balagh allow establishing formal legal recommendation for an act featuring a transmitted reward, either by waiving certain evidentiary standards in recommended acts or by generating a secondary legal command triggered by the arrival of the promise (al-balāgh). Numerous detailed sub-branches of recommended acts were built upon this foundation, particularly where no conflicting proof or harm existed.

This orientation grants weak reports a broader jurisprudential effect than mere individual hope, yet it remains bounded. It does not apply to known fabrications, prohibited acts under another title, claims of historical fact, or assertions of creedal doctrine. Contemporary scholars have emphasized that transmitting the history of Ashura or a biography does not become authentic simply because it contains moral exhortation or weeping; the principle of reward—even if accepted—applies to physical actions, not to authenticating historical narratives.

3. The View of Compliance and Promised Reward

Other scholars interpreted these reports as a divine promise of grace for the compliant individual (al-munqād): the practitioner has not established legal recommendation, but acts out of hope that the report is true, receiving reward for noble intent. On this basis, no new Sunnah is created, and one cannot state 'this is religiously recommended,' but rather 'it is permissible to perform out of hope.' This reading preserves the literal text of the reports while keeping foundational rules of proof intact.

The practical difference emerges in instruction. A jurist favoring compliance does not include the act in lists of established Sunnahs, nor does he censure those who omit it or declare its details with certainty. Furthermore, he cannot cite the report to prove a historical event or personal virtue, because the divine promise targets an act performed out of hope, not the truth-value of the historical claim.

4. Grand Ayatollah al-Khoei's Critique

Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim al-Khoei critically analyzed the principle of leniency, demonstrating that akhbār man balagh do not establish legal recommendation in the conventional sense. He argued that their sole function is securing divine reward for compliance or precaution (al-iḥtiyāt). Consequently, he explicitly stated in various applied rulings that the principle 'has no foundation' as a mechanism for establishing legal recommendation [14].

His conclusion dictates that a jurist cannot issue a formal decree of recommendation for a specific detail based on a weak report, even if performing it out of hope remains permissible in the absence of conflicting evidence.

This result closely aligns with arguments of the rigorous Sunni trend: the foundation of an act may be proven by general evidence, but weak reports cannot generate independent rulings. Yet it does not prohibit precautionary practice; rather, it changes its legal categorization and language of attribution, proving that stringency is not an opposition to spirituality, but a defense of scholarly accuracy.

5. Weak Reports in Imami Hadith Theory (Dirāyah)

Imami scholars of Hadith terminology affirmed the permissibility of transmitting weak reports in admonitions, stories, and virtues under specific controls, emphasizing the vital distinction between weak and fabricated reports. Al-Mīr Dāmād expressed a view close to the majority position regarding acting upon weak reports in rituals and devotions, but emphasized that this never authorized lying or abandoning textual criticism [15], [22].

These texts reveal significant common ground across intellectual traditions: the domain of virtues accommodates reports below the standard of authentic, but fabrications are strictly excluded, and transmission formulas remain integral to scholarly honesty. Dispute centers on the exact legal result: Does it establish a specific recommendation, generate a reward for hopeful compliance, or exert no legal effect unless corroborated?

Section Two: Boundaries Between Leniency and Infiltration of Fabrications

1. Non-Severe Weakness

The first boundary requires evaluating the cause of weakness. A hurried transmission (mursāl), an unidentified narrator (majhūl), or one with minor memory flaws retains a possibility of authentic origin. Conversely, a liar, a narrator accused of fabrication, or one with egregious errors cannot enter the domain of leniency. A general label such as 'its chain is weak' is insufficient; the specific tier of weakness must be identified, as public dissemination decisions depend upon it.

Constructing a textual card recording gaps, narrator statuses, route diversity, and source chronology is essential. If a report is known only in a late 10th-century work, depends on a single suspect narrator, or contradicts trustworthy chains, it enters the domain of rejection. If it arrives through independent, non-severely weak routes, it qualifies for consideration.

2. Subsumption Under an Established Principle

Subsumption requires that an established principle witness to the genus and essential structure of the act, without the weak report introducing restrictions that alter its fundamental nature. Supplication is inherently recommended, but inventing a fixed, recurring supplication with specific counts, times, and promised rewards requires independent proof for those specifics. Prayer is recommended, but a twelve-unit prayer with specific recitations on the first Friday night of Rajab cannot be validated by the general virtue of prayer alone.

Furthermore, a clear line must be drawn between encouraging an established obligation and claiming a specific unperceived reward. A preacher may utilize a weak report to remind listeners of a sound principle, but assigning specific divine rewards belongs exclusively to the Lawgiver. Replacing unverified counts with authentic verses or Hadiths preserves the pedagogical purpose without risk.

3. Non-Contradiction with Decisive Proofs

A report that contradicts the Quran, authentic Sunnah, established creed, or historical facts cannot be saved by leniency. Similarly, if an act entails a prohibited outcome, infringes on human rights, or spreads superstition, leniency is inapplicable. Leniency operates only in the absence of conflicting evidence. Recent academic studies have reaffirmed that *akhbār man balagh* cannot validate contradictory reports or weak historical claims.

Contradiction includes violating the pedagogical aims of encouragement itself. A report promising absolute salvation for a trivial utterance encourages moral complacency, while one threatening severe punishment for omitting a voluntary act destabilizes the hierarchy of religious duties. This textual anomaly demands critical rejection, even if *isnād* analysis alone is inconclusive.

4. Absence of Belief in Definitive Issuance

Advocates of leniency require that a practitioner acts out of precaution, not out of belief that the promise was definitively uttered. However, this inner psychological state is difficult to preserve during public dissemination. As a report is repeated in sermons, calendars, and broadcasts, it settles in the public mind as fact. Thus, this internal requirement must be translated into visible safeguards: explicit declarations of Hadith grade, framing practice around hope, and prohibiting assertive phrasing.

If a publisher cannot convey this distinction to their audience, restricting content to authentic material is mandatory. Scholarly methodology evaluates not merely the speaker's intent, but the audience's capacity for comprehension.

5. Preventing Manufactured Renown

Uncritical repetition produces false social authenticity. The public assumes a practice is *mutawātir* (universally transmitted) simply because it is ubiquitous, even if its historical origin traces back to a single late booklet. Scholars must investigate the earliest original source rather than counting search engine results. Furthermore, a distinction must be drawn between the antiquity of a custom and the antiquity of its text; a practice may be culturally old while the text forged to justify it is late.

This danger is acute during seasonal occasions. Annual rituals are exceptionally difficult to correct once established. Hence, rigorous verification must precede incorporating material into official religious programming. The cost of preliminary verification is negligible compared to eradicating an entrenched, ungrounded custom.

6. Explicit Clarification Upon Transmission

Transmitters must actively prevent deception. If a hadith is severely weak, its status must be stated; if fabricated, transmission is unlawful except to warn against it. Where critics disagree, a transmitter should state: 'Weakened by X and declared fair by Y,' explaining the reason where possible. Using ambiguous phrases like 'It was reported in Hadith' to mask ignorance of source critical status is unacceptable.

A standardized vocabulary for public transmission is recommended: 'Established' (*ṣaḥīḥ*), 'Declared fair by some' (*ḥasan*), 'Reported with weak chain' (*ḍaʿīf*), 'Unauthentic' (*ḍaʿīf jiddan*), and 'Declared fabricated' (*mawḍūʿ*). This explicit terminology prevents leniency from degenerating into public misdirection.

Section Three: Applied Models

1. Ṣalāt al-Raghā'ib

A specialized prayer for the first Friday night of Rajab with specific structures and immense rewards is transmitted in popular literature. Major Hadith critics declared its report fabricated. Al-Nawawī explicitly stated that this prayer is an abominable innovation and its hadith is false, because general principles of prayer cannot establish specific structures, times, and rewards [4], [11], [23].

Regulated leniency cannot apply here: weakness is severe, specific details construct a composite new ritual, and public renown transforms it into an artificial Sunnah.

In Imami jurisprudence, relying on akhbār man balagh is insufficient to validate its attribution or structural details. The maximum acceptable position under certain frameworks is performing prayer out of general hope, provided it is not presented as an established Sunnah. Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallāh critically examined this issue, emphasizing that general principles of leniency do not eliminate the requirement for reliable evidence when establishing structured prayers.

2. Specific Virtues of Quranic Chapters

Tafsīr works frequently include reports detailing rewards for reciting individual Quranic chapters. While authentic virtues exist for specific chapters (e.g., Al-Baqarah, Al-Ikhlāṣ), comprehensive series assigning uniform rewards to every chapter were forged by ascetics to re-engage people with the Quran. This model reveals a paradox: noble intent applied to a sacred text, yet forgery undermines the Quran by suggesting its inherent greatness requires false claims.

The correct methodology requires textual disaggregation: rather than blanket acceptance or rejection, each report must be evaluated individually. Authentic reports are accepted, fair ones noted, mildly weak ones managed under strict conditions, and fabrications explicitly denounced. Furthermore, leniency cannot authenticate historical claims regarding occasions of revelation, as leniency applies to hopeful practice, not to validating historical facts.

3. Disproportionate Rewards for Trivial Deeds

Messages frequently circulate promising the erasure of millions of sins or the construction of thousands of palaces for a brief utterance. While gross disproportion is a recognized textual marker of fabrication, it is not an absolute standalone proof; divine grace is vast, and authentic texts occasionally promise immense rewards for simple acts. The correct test combines isnād analysis, stylistic evaluation, variant comparison, structural relation to obligatory duties, and source antiquity.

If a report lacks authentic backing, depends on suspect narrators, appears exclusively in late sources, and exhibits wildly fluctuating numbers, markers of fabrication are present. Conversely, if its chain exhibits minor weakness while the core remembrance is established, practicing the general remembrance is permissible without asserting the specific counts or extraordinary rewards. Thus, critics preserve spiritual hope without endorsing false detail.

4. Omission of Al-Mundhirī's Technical Symbols

Al-Mundhirī frequently cited hadiths using passive phrasing to signal weakness, yet later abridgers systematically omitted his intro, codes, and critical remarks. The analytical fault lies within the chain of reception. Critical methodology must monitor the 'circulating version' rather than assuming readers consult original texts. A report once embedded in a scholarly work with explicit technical caveats becomes an uncontextualized absolute quote in a mobile application.

The solution requires restoring source attribution, explaining original technical definitions, and updating Hadith grades using modern databases. Simply stating 'transmitted by al-Mundhirī' as if it implies authentication misrepresents the author, who collected material as a critical compiler rather than an authenticating editor.

5. Analysis of the 'Man Balagh' Reports Themselves

The reports of man balagh serve as a meta-proof regulating treatment of promise-bearing reports, yet they cannot function without interpretation. Utilizing them to waive all critical standards produces circular reasoning: a report requiring critical analysis is used to exempt thousands of reports from critical analysis. When understood as a divine promise of reward for compliance (inqiyād), circularity vanishes: the truth of the detailed report remains unproven, while the believer is rewarded for noble intent.

Furthermore, their explicit condition 'something of good' prevents application to innovations, prohibited acts, or ungrounded practices. They do not apply to purely informational reports lacking action—such as

birth dates, death dates, or dramatic dialogues—nor do they validate attributing personal virtues. Thus, a jurisprudential principle regulating hopeful action must not be misapplied as an instrument for historical authentication.

6. Ashura Narratives and Homiletic Preaching

In assemblies commemorating Ashura, historical narrative blends with encouragement regarding weeping and visitation. Leniency frequently leads to accepting emotionally compelling details because they fulfill a pedagogical purpose. Yet emotional utility cannot establish historical reality. Three distinct questions must be separated: Did the event occur? Is commemorating it recommended? Is a specific quantified reward verified? The answers may differ fundamentally [19].

Recent academic studies demonstrate that the principle of leniency does not exempt a speaker from authenticating historical martyrdom accounts (*al-maqātil*), and that transmitting weak narratives assertively harms the cause it seeks to serve. Elegy and poetry may be utilized as literary art without presenting artistic expressions as verified history.

7. Health and Social Warnings

Reports linking specific sins to immediate worldly punishments—such as poverty, disease, or the death of offspring—circulate widely, frequently resulting in stigmatization or distorted views of divine justice. Even where a sin is unquestionably prohibited, specific worldly causal relationships cannot be proven by weak reports. Warning reports require stricter critical scrutiny than encouraging reports due to their potential for social harm.

Unverified threat reports should be replaced with authentic texts emphasizing general consequences of sin alongside repentance and mercy. The pedagogical objective is not generating anxiety by any means, but building responsible moral agency grounded in authentic revelation.

Section Four: Comparative Analysis of Sunni and Imami Methodologies

1. Areas of Convergence

Rigorous scholars across Sunni and Imami traditions agree on fundamental principles: the absolute prohibition of forging hadiths, the exclusion of fabrications from leniency, the rejection of reports contradicting the Quran or established constants, and the necessity of distinguishing Hadith grades. Furthermore, both converge on the lawfulness of hopeful action for acts grounded in established general principles, even as they debate the precise legal status generated by weak reports.

Both traditions affirm that chain weakness does not automatically prove textual falsehood, as a text may be corroborated by alternative routes or general principles. Thus, constructive scholarly dialogue must avoid collecting the weakest material of an opposing school to misrepresent its normative tradition; sound comparative methodology evaluates what authorized scholars actually rely upon.

2. Primary Differences

The divergence lies in the ultimate source of permission. The lenient Sunni trend relies on historical practice of Hadith critics and conditions governing virtues of deeds, whereas the dominant Imami trend builds upon *akhbār man balagh* and jurisprudential analysis of compliance (*inqiyād*). Additionally, the status of statements from Imams alongside prophetic reports creates distinct structural features in *isnād* analysis and biographical evaluation (*‘ilm al-rijāl*). Yet applied outcomes frequently converge: a non-severely weak report regarding a grounded good act, free of contradiction, is practiced out of hope rather than definitive certainty.

Conversely, the rigorous trend in both schools maintains that recommendation is a formal legal ruling requiring valid proof. Select Imami jurists concur that *akhbār man balagh* do not establish formal recommendation, but merely promise divine grace for compliance. Thus, methodological divisions do not run strictly along sectarian lines, but frequently divide internal schools of thought.

3. Terminological Divergence

The term 'weak' (*ḍa‘īf*) in early usage included material later classified as 'fair' (*ḥasan*), while 'leniency' often signified relaxing requirements for peak authentic chains rather than abandoning criticism. In Imami tradition, 'weak' may reflect late four-fold classifications while jurists continue relying on a report due to contextual indicators (*qarā’in*). Thus, comparative analysis must look beyond surface terms to underlying functions.

A researcher must reconstruct a scholar's methodology from their introduction, source selection, and citation methods, rather than an isolated term. Using 'it is reported' may signal critical caution in one

author and standard phrasing in another, making contextual applied analysis superior to rigid theoretical categorization.

4. Balancing Pedagogical Benefit and Risk

The lenient trend prioritizes spiritual development and the possibility of capturing divine grace, whereas the rigorous trend prioritizes protecting revelation from forgery and unwarranted legislation. A comprehensive methodology does not discard either concern, but balances them based on the nature of the claim. Where an act is grounded, the report mildly weak, and the transmitter transparent, spiritual benefit outweighs risk. Where a report creates novel structures, extraordinary rewards, historical narratives, or communal rituals, risk dominates, demanding absolute stringency.

Hence, the analytical question is not merely 'Is this report about virtues?' but rather: What does it add? Who will act upon it? How will it be presented? Does an authentic alternative exist? What is the cost of error? These questions transform debate from impressionistic rhetoric into reasoned methodology.

Discussion

These results indicate that the long-standing debate should not be reduced to a binary opposition between “accepting” and “rejecting” weak Hadiths. The decisive question is what epistemic and legal function a report is being asked to perform. If the act is independently established and the weak report merely reinforces motivation, regulated use may preserve pedagogical value without treating the report as proof. If, however, the report creates a new ritual form, a fixed count, a specific time, an extraordinary reward, or a historical assertion, the evidentiary burden increases because the weak report is no longer functioning as secondary encouragement but as an independent source of detail [10], [11].

The comparison also explains why rigor and leniency often converge in practice once their conditions are applied consistently. The rigorous position protects attribution by requiring verified evidence for formal religious claims [9], whereas the more cautious Imami reading permits reward for compliant practice without converting uncertain attribution into established Sunnah [14]. This convergence is especially important for contemporary preaching and digital communication, where repeated circulation can manufacture social certainty even when scholarly certainty is absent. The findings therefore support a model that integrates isnād assessment, matn criticism, legal classification, transmission language, and public-impact analysis rather than relying on a single label of “weak” or “acceptable” [21].

Chapter Three: Proposed Critical Model and Methodological Errors

Section One: Proposed Seven-Stage Model for Handling Reports

Stage 1: Functional Classification

The report must be classified: Does it establish a foundational worship, describe general virtues, specify times/places, mandate counts/structures, quantify spiritual rewards, narrate historical events, or issue worldly threats? Higher specificity demands higher evidentiary proof. Furthermore, the context of usage must be defined: specialized research, public sermon, formal fatwa, digital post, or personal practice.

Stage 2: Textual Criticism and Route Collection (Takhrij)

Researchers must trace the report to its earliest primary sources, compiling all variants, chains, and wording changes to identify derivative copying. Technical rulings of early critics must be recorded alongside their underlying evidence rather than citing names blindly. If an authentic or fair chain is discovered, the report exits the domain of weakness entirely; if all chains converge on a single suspect narrator, multiplicity of late sources adds no evidentiary value.

Stage 3: Grading Severity of Weakness

Weakness must be graded: minor/passable weakness, moderate weakness requiring corroboration, severe weakness incapable of support, or outright fabrication. The specific cause of defect must be stated—such as irsāl, narrator obscurity, memory flaws, chain disconnection, textual anomaly, or accusation of forgery—preventing the generic label 'weak' from masking critical distinctions.

Stage 4: Textual Content Analysis (Matn Testing)

The text must be evaluated against the Quran, authentic Sunnah, definitive reason, established history, classical Arabic linguistics, and higher pedagogical objectives. Scholars evaluate proportionality between act and reward, numerical patterns, interpolation risks, and sectarian bias. Textual anomaly alone does not prove fabrication, but combined with chain defects it justifies total rejection.

Stage 5: Verification of General Principle Subsumption

The researcher must identify the specific established principle supporting the act and determine its exact scope, separating core practices from added details. If general charity is established, it cannot validate specific daily counts; if reading Quran is virtuous, it cannot validate fabricated rewards for individual chapters. Authentic alternatives fulfilling the spiritual purpose must be presented.

Stage 6: Determining Transmission Formulas

Transmitters must select language matching exact Hadith grades: authentic, fair, contested, weak, severely weak, or fabricated. Where hopeful practice is permitted, it must be stated explicitly. Assertive phrasing ('The Prophet said') is strictly prohibited for unverified reports. In digital media, Hadith grades must appear embedded within graphics rather than hidden in external links.

Stage 7: Public Impact Assessment

Publishers must evaluate public impact: Will this report construct an ungrounded ritual, induce unhealthy fear, or issue a binding judgment? Will it overshadow authentic Sunnahs? Can the audience comprehend qualifications? If harm is probable, reliance on authentic alternatives is mandatory. Public dissemination requires far stricter criteria than private practice, as public error multiplies exponentially.

Section Two: Common Methodological Errors

1. Conflating Sound Meaning with Authentic Provenance

A text may express a noble meaning yet remain completely unauthentic as a Hadith. Such statements may be cited as wisdom or literature if attributed correctly, but never attributed to an infallible authority. Soundness of meaning is a weak indicator that cannot authenticate a chain, as fabricators frequently dressed forged chains in pious sentiments.

2. Conflating Hopeful Practice with Established Sunnah

Performing an act out of hope gives an individual no authority to present it to the public as an established Sunnah, nor to censure those who omit it. Transforming private precaution into communal programming requires evidence proportional to its public impact.

3. Superficial Multiplication of Late Sources

Repeating a report across dozens of late websites or books adds zero evidentiary weight if all depend on a single flawed origin. The true measure is route independence and source proximity. Transmitters must construct transmission trees before counting secondary references.

4. Misapplying Leniency Principles Outside Their Scope

Principles of leniency cannot authenticate historical events, creedal doctrines, medical claims, or legal permissions, nor can they validate fabrications or attribute personal virtues. Under certain frameworks, they do not even establish legal recommendation. Citing leniency without defining its exact theoretical limits is a major methodological fallacy.

5. Concealing Scholarly Disagreement

Where one critic authenticates a report and another weakens it, scholarly integrity requires presenting the disagreement and its underlying causes, rather than cherry-picking judgments that suit a preacher's immediate goals. Contemporary scholarship must not present modern individual *ijtihād* as classical consensus.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that reports of encouragement and warning do not constitute a zone exempt from critical Hadith scrutiny. On the contrary, they demand multi-layered criticism due to their high emotional impact, rapid viral dissemination, and historical vulnerability to fabrication. Furthermore, the classical phrase 'leniency in virtues' does not possess a single uniform meaning; it may denote transmitting non-fabricated reports with their chains, accepting minor weakness for consideration, or practicing an act grounded in established principles out of hope. Among careful scholars, it never implies authenticating fabrications or licensing assertive attributions to revelation.

Analytical comparison reveals that disagreement between lenient and rigorous trends narrows significantly when governing conditions are enforced. Advocates of leniency exclude severe weakness, mandate subsumption under established principles, prohibit belief in definitive issuance, and require absence of contradiction. Proponents of rigor demonstrate that under these exact conditions, the practice rests upon the established principle and precaution, rather than the evidentiary force of the weak report.

Imami legal theory converges at this exact juncture through the distinction between establishing formal recommendation and receiving grace for compliance. Therefore, academic inquiry must shift from the binary question of 'acceptance versus rejection' to nuanced evaluations of function, Hadith grade, transmission formula, and public impact.

The central conclusion of this research is that faithful transmission does not oppose effective pedagogy; rather, it protects it. Sermons built upon authentic foundations are profoundly more enduring, and clarifying Hadith weakness educates believers in religious truthfulness rather than uncritical emotionalism. Unregulated leniency that strips chains, omits critical caveats, and asserts unverified text creates an 'imagined Sunnah' over time that becomes nearly impossible to detach from authentic religion. The proposed seven-stage model offers a practical framework uniting the rigor of the Hadith critic with the responsibility of the preacher, jurist, and digital publisher.

Findings

1. Encouragement and warning represent a rhetorical function encompassing virtues, admonitions, and divine promises/threats, rather than a single Hadith grade.
2. Weak Hadith is vastly broader than fabricated Hadith; converting the legal status of one into the other without evidence is scientifically invalid.
3. Leniency among early scholars did not mean abandoning criticism, but relaxing isnād requirements for material already grounded in authentic principles.
4. Fabricated reports are universally excluded from leniency by consensus of Sunni and Imami scholars.
5. Non-severe weakness is an absolute prerequisite for leniency, excluding liars, suspect narrators, and those with egregious memory flaws.
6. Subsumption under an established principle validates only the general genus of an act, never its specific counts, timing, structures, or extraordinary rewards.
7. Precautionary practice out of hope is legally distinct from issuing a formal fatwa of recommendation or assertively attributing a text to revelation.
8. Transmission formulas are integral components of Hadith judgments; omitting them alters the author's intended assessment.
9. Al-Mundhirī's methodology is built on graduated classification; the presence of a report in his work does not constitute absolute authentication.
10. The rigorous trend rests upon the legal principle that recommendation is a formal ruling and unperceived spiritual rewards require verified proof.
11. Enforcing the conditions of the lenient trend brings its applied outcomes close to the rigorous trend, as weak reports cease to function as independent legislation.
12. Akhbār man balagh do not authenticate weak reports, as their literal phrasing explicitly assumes the possibility that the text was never uttered.
13. Imami interpretations of man balagh range from establishing secondary recommendation to promising divine grace for compliance.
14. Grand Ayatollah al-Khoei's analysis restricts the effect of man balagh to reward for compliance, denying formal recommendation.
15. Principles of leniency cannot authenticate historical facts, personal virtues, or creedal doctrines.
16. Transmitting historical Ashura narratives requires independent textual verification distinct from homiletic objectives.
17. Ubiquity across late sources frequently stems from derivative copying and does not equal independent multiple transmission routes.
18. Extraordinary rewards and anomalous numbers serve as critical markers for investigation, not standalone proofs of fabrication.
19. Criteria for public dissemination must be significantly stricter than criteria for individual precautionary practice.
20. Weak warning reports generate psychological and social harm, requiring extra critical caution.
21. Assigning fixed structures and times to worship cannot be proven by general principles of prayer or supplication alone.
22. Authentic alternatives fulfill pedagogical goals without risking false attribution to revelation.
23. Scientific Hadith evaluation must be graduated: fair, weak, severely weak, rejected, or fabricated.

24. The proposed seven-stage model integrates takhrīj, text criticism, transmission formulas, and public impact assessment.

Recommendations

1. Develop a comprehensive digital encyclopedia of encouragement and warning reports, detailing Hadith grades, underlying defects, and authentic alternatives.
2. Require public speakers, preachers, and digital publishers to state explicit Hadith grades in prominent locations.
3. Incorporate the critical distinction between hopeful practice and formal Sunnah into university curricula for Hadith and jurisprudence.
4. Re-edit popular abridgments of Hadith compendia to restore original authorial symbols, citations, and critical notes.
5. Map source transmission trees for seasonal devotional reports prior to incorporating them into official religious programming.
6. Strictly prohibit transmitting fabricated reports except when explicitly warning against their forgery.
7. Decouple historical narratives from legal principles of leniency in religious educational institutions.
8. Expand comparative studies between Sunni and Imami traditions regarding virtues, martyrdom accounts, and supplications.
9. Train religious preachers to substitute unverified reports with authentic texts that achieve the same moral purpose.
10. Establish institutional peer-review processes for public digital religious content prior to broadcast.
11. Adopt nuanced probabilistic language (probability tiers) rather than rigid binary labels in areas of scholarly ijtihād.
12. Conduct empirical interdisciplinary research on the psychological and social impacts of unverified threat reports on public audiences.

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