

6. It's Only a Matter of Practice!



Long, long, ago in faraway China, there lived an archer called Chen Yaozi. He was a very skilled archer and could perform wonderful feats of archery. He could hit the target precisely at the centre even when it was placed at a very long distance. He liked to show off his skill to the admiring crowds that gathered around him.

One day, he was practising his skill in front of many admirers when he noticed an old man standing at the back. The man was carrying gourds of oil that were hanging from a long cane on his shoulder. All the other people were clapping their hands and praising Chen Yaozi. But this old man was quiet. He neither clapped nor uttered words of praise. He just stood there nodding his head, and said, “It’s just a matter of practice!”

Chen Yaozi was annoyed. “Are you an archer yourself? Do you think anyone can do what I can do with my bow and arrows?” “No, Sir,” the old man replied. “I am not an archer. And I don’t doubt your skill. All I said was – everything’s a matter of practice.”



Chen Yaozi became very angry. “What do you know that you pass such thoughtless comments on other people? Who are you?”

“Please don’t get angry, Sir. I am an oil seller as you must have guessed from the gourds. Every day, I fill these gourds with oil and sell them. Over the years, I have achieved some skill in filling the gourds. If you allow, I’ll show it to you.”

“Hmmm...,” growled Chen Yaozi. Everybody was curious to see what would happen next.

Patiently, the old man set down an empty gourd on the ground. Then he put a small coin on the mouth of the gourd. In those days, small coins had a little hole at the centre. Then the old man stood up, took some oil in his ladle and began to pour oil into the gourd from a height. The oil went straight into the gourd through the hole in the coin. When the old man had finished filling up the gourd, he lifted up the coin. Not a trace of oil could be seen on it.

The people watching it were speechless with wonder.

But the old man only smiled, "As I said, there's nothing special about it. It's only a matter of practice, you see."

Chen Yaozi lost all his anger and annoyance. He just gave a short laugh and said, "You have taught me something important today."

After that Chen Yaozi never showed off or boasted about his skill as an archer.



- **archer** : someone who shoots arrows from a bow. • **feats** : achievements that require a lot of skill, strength etc. • **precisely** : exactly.
- **gourds** : containers made from dried large fruit with a hard skin.
- **uttered** : said. • **speechless** : unable to speak.

Things to do :

1. Answer the following questions:
 - (a) Who was Chen Yaozi?
 - (b) What did he like?
 - (c) What did the old man say?
 - (d) What could the old man do? Describe it in one sentence.
 - (e) What did Chen Yaozi tell the old man at the end?
2. Use the following in your own sentences:
 - * show off * annoyed * doubt (something or someone)
 - * If you allow * not a trace * boasted.
3. If you were to master one skill, what would you like to learn ?
How will you learn it?