23rd May 2023

Stop!

"Stop-look-and-listen."
Road Safety Slogan, *from 1912 onwards*

The 100m men's world sprint record is 9.58 seconds, and is held by retired Jamaican sprinter, Usain Bolt. This makes Bolt the fastest man on two legs, his maximum speed being 28mph. The Tiger Beetle, on the other hand, relative to its size, is the fastest creature on Earth. Some of these half-inch-long beetles cover about 120 body-lengths per second, while, in comparison, Bolt could only do 5 body-lengths per second. To beat the tiger beetle, therefore, a person would have to hit 480mph.

But the tiger beetle has a problem. At peak speeds, everything becomes a blur. It's travelling so fast that it can't gather enough light with its eyes. Its vision is compromised because its brain simply can't process everything that's around it. So … after a sprint, it has to stop, take stock, let everything sink in, before it's off to the races again.

After his 100m sprints, especially when he won his Olympic golds or broke the world record, Usain Bolt stopped too, of course. But that was at the *end* of the race, to soak in the adulation, appreciate the triumph, revel in the success. But not the tiger beetle. It has to stop *regularly,* to make sure it can make sense of what's happening, and before it starts scurrying after its prey or away from danger once more. And if it doesn't, everything remains a blur, and the tiger beetle is in trouble.

Sometimes these "Thought for the Day" pieces write themselves and the "point" doesn't need much elaboration. Today is one of those days. If we run too fast, no matter how productive our running might be, do we not find sometimes that our brain isn't processing what's happening clearly enough? So, we need to stop from time to time, not at the *end,* for success or adulation, but *while it's happening.*

I mentioned a while ago the advice from an experienced police officer in the Belfast-based police drama, *Blue Lights.* "Take a beat," was his guidance to a rookie policeman. "Take a beat. Stop and think, before you rush on." Stop! Let your brain – and your heart and soul – take time to work out what's happening, before you start racing again. Stop and take it in – like the tiger beetle. It'll safer, and more productive, that way.

A prayer for today

"So, I've stopped, Lord. What now?" "Stopping is enough. Just wait, and rest in me."

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