

The End of Our World

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of humans around the world are on the move, political refugees and economic migrants. They are already and will continue to radically change the character of the societies they are moving into.

Throughout history humans have always migrated, from land to land and from continent to continent. They were pushed by climate change, by poverty, and by unemployment to search for more fertile land, and sometimes they migrated out of a lust for conquest. "The barbarians are coming" has always been on our lips. Species, tribes, nations, and civilizations rose and fell. Such claims to territory as existed were just swept aside. A new thug or ruler brought a new set of laws and religions. You can roll off the list of conquerors, migrations forced and chosen, of empires won and lost. But the single most significant feature of all these migrations is that, in one way or another, they benefitted the places they ended up in.

Humans, being the shortsighted creatures that they are, thought they could rely on boundaries, laws, and treaties to protect themselves. For short periods of time they often could. But inexorably the tide turned, cities fell, cultures and empires collapsed. Out of their ruins new ones emerged and the cycle continued and continues today. We in the west now are no less arrogant than were the Greeks, the Persians, the Romans, the Catholics, the Muslims, the Marxists, and now the contrasting worldviews of socialists and capitalists. Each one had and does contain the seeds of its own destruction.

After the Second World War, Western Europe decided to try again. It determined to reduce the national rivalries, to share and work together rather than to compete with each other for dominance. Social welfare systems expanded dramatically. Across the globe a new order of human rights and moral obligations struggled to emerge. But none of this could eradicate the basic core of human greed, envy, and prejudice that remained like spores of a disease deeply embedded in society.

Postwar Europe needed workers. The locals no longer wanted or needed to work in unglamorous jobs. Immigrants were needed, as they had always been, to do the dirty work, run the buses, clear the refuse, and clean the houses. Did the populace welcome them? Not really. And as each new tide swept in from the old imperial empires, they were met with ungrateful segregation and disrespect.

Now there is a massive influx into Europe of millions from the Middle East and Africa that is impossible to halt. It's not just Europe of course (which is getting all the publicity at the moment), it is everywhere. Some may well be criminals, some dependent on support, but many come in the hope of a better life; they head to countries with the best welfare opportunities. And Europe needs them because of its aging population and decreasing pools of

workers.

But essentially the migrants are coming because of the failure of their home countries, because of the ghastly worlds they live in, of political and religious oppression, obscurantism, and corruption. They try one route, and if that is blocked they try another. Those disgusting regimes will not go away, and so the stream will continue to flow.

Because Europe is now constrained by international conventions that only a few parts of world adhere to, they have no moral right or logic to stop those trying to escape human suffering from coming in. It is pointless and futile even to try. We Jews once were these hopeless refugees, and then the West, one by one, cut off the escape routes. Those who once tried to stem the flow of Jews now complain that Jews, having failed to get humane treatment elsewhere, have gone and set up their own refuge. But whereas most Jews never wanted to retain links with the places or cultures they left or wanted to impose their religion on others, and most quickly assimilated, that is not going to happen in this case. It is possible that assimilation might ameliorate this present doomsday prediction, and I hope so, but I am not optimistic.

The West all of a sudden is trying to shut the gates again. But, as with water, if you shut off one route, it will always find another. It can't be done, aside from whether it should or should not. Just as you cannot end crime, so you will not stop people smugglers. In one way we have progressed morally. We know we cannot ignore human suffering the way we once we did. But the result may well be the end of Europe as we know it.

A few years ago it was Israel that seemed the easy route out of East Africa. Israel is small enough to put up fences, even though it was condemned morally for it. The sci-fi film World War Z depicted Israel's fence as the only thing that saved it from the zombies who invaded everywhere else. It's a scenario that is proving true in the ISIS Middle East today. But, as the film suggested, it could not hold out alone forever. And, no, I didn't see it!

The only alternative political model is a fascist dictatorship like Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia, Mao's China, and many Islamic states. This kind of regime, like China and Russia today, tries to buy people's quiescence while limiting their freedoms and ignoring human rights. It is possible that both models will coexist in a tense but accommodating symbiosis, trading commercially and sometimes putting money before guns.

The USA likewise has this problem, though there is much dissimilarity too—not least, the differences in cultural background. But in the USA there are other threats to survival. The massive gap between the haves and have-nots will exacerbate the tensions between classes, religions, and races. For all the dreams of its founders, the USA now looks dysfunctional.

We are in the process of leaving a relatively peaceful and secure time for one of desperation and division. The next generation will experience a new and very different world. It will be one of science fiction, where huge numbers of people will be on the move because of climate change, terror, and

relative poverty. They will use modern methods of transport, held off either by physical or natural boundaries.

Open societies will be fundamentally changed, and I just do not have the confidence in democratic political systems to believe that they can stop it. If we fall back on survival, on "me first", this will lead to anarchy. Bakunin was right. I am beginning to sympathize with the Russian nihilists. Only small inward-looking, self-protected communities will survive. But I wouldn't want to live in one.

Perhaps that's why so many people believe in messiahs. If humans can't make the world a better place, perhaps God will.