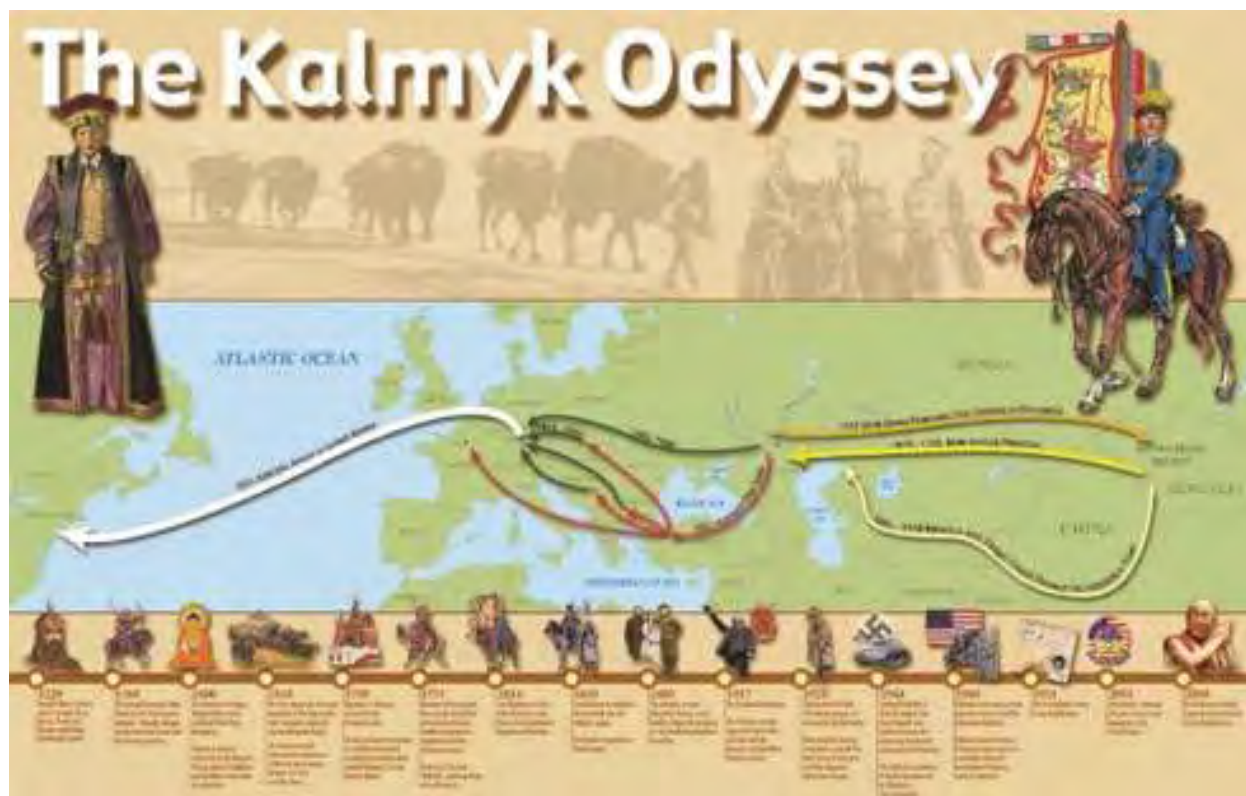


## Mongolian Buddhism

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In the winter of 1951-52, several hundred Kalmyk-Mongolians settled in Howell Township, New Jersey. Against all odds, this remnant of a larger diaspora had weathered adversities and successfully maintained a distinct cultural identity despite compelling group dissolution and assimilation in a succession of host countries along the way. Ironically, at the furthest point of their joint venture, Howell's Kalmyk community encountered their greatest challenge: preservation of their unique culture and group identity in the safest and most benevolent host country yet.

To celebrate obtaining their path to American citizenship, and to honor and maintain their faith, the ex-refugees began converting a two-car garage on a communal tract in Howell Township's "Freewood Acres" subdivision. In late November 1952, within a year of arrival, the community consecrated the first ever Tibetan Buddhist worship center in North America! This had been the group's top priority since leaving the ramshackle Displaced Persons Camps in Germany where most had been interned since the end of WWII. They named their center Rashi Gempil Ling, "Sanctuary for the Increase of Auspiciousness and Virtue" in Tibetan. Unbeknownst to anyone at the time, that celebration began a series of events that, among other things, directly led to the successful escape of His Holiness the Dalai Lama from Tibet in 1959 and to the Dalai Lama's triumphant but politically controversial debut in America in 1979. Kalmyk-Mongolians migrated from the Altai Mountains in western Mongolia to the Volga River Basin of southern Russia at about the time Puritans were settling Massachusetts Colony. Kalmyk Mongolians are remnants of the once formidable Mongol Empire.

Today the Kalmyk people struggle with a new kind of conflict, a conflict of Traditionalism and Modernism. After over 60 years in America the Kalmyk community is losing its traditions, history and culture to modern society and the current generation's pursuit of the American Dream. Join us in exploring the ways in which this community is taking on the challenge of keeping their traditions and also embracing a forward march into modernity that is inescapable. By designing a Ger (Yurt) Village on the Howell NJ Kalmyk's Buddhist Temple property the community looks to keep its culture alive while sharing its rich history through traditional festivals, educational tours, and planned community center events. The Mongol House and Yurt Village is planned for completion in the summer of 2018. See you there.

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