

**JUDAISM AND  
“HUMAN COMPOSTING”:  
VALUES, OPPORTUNITIES,  
AND QUESTIONS**



**RABBI SETH GOLDSTEIN  
RRA CONVENTION, 5784/2024**

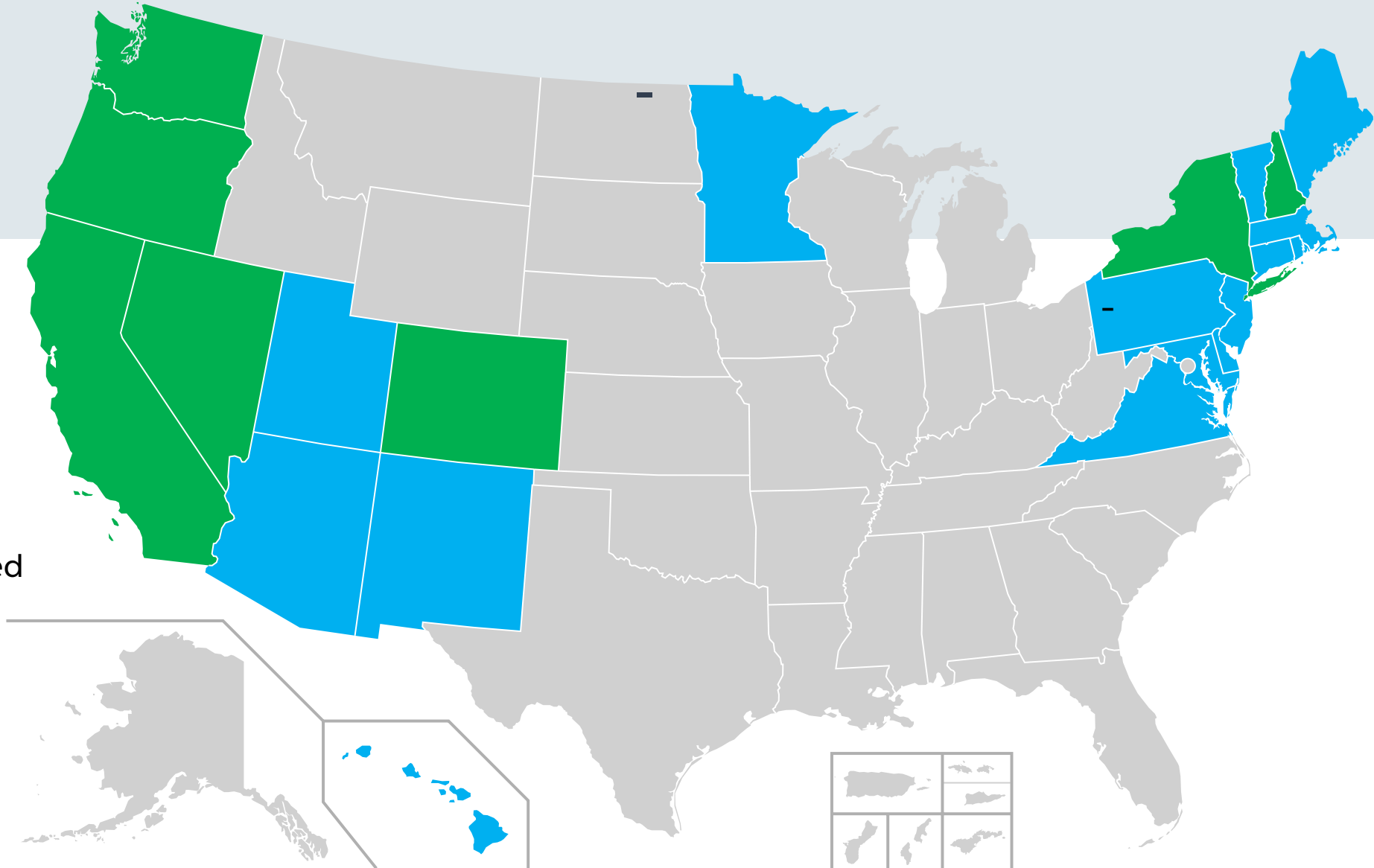


## WHAT IS MY INTEREST?

- RECONSTRUCTIONIST, CONGREGATIONAL RABBI FOR 20 YEARS
- NOT AN NOR ACTIVIST—I DIDN'T WORK OR LOBBY FOR IT
- MY STATE (WA) BECAME THE FIRST STATE TO LEGALIZE: “RABBI, IS THIS OK? IS THIS KOSHER?”
- פּוֹק הָזִי מֵאֵי עֲמַא דְּבֵר ( “GO AND SEE WHAT THE PEOPLE ARE DOING”), A TALMUDIC PRINCIPLE THAT STATES THAT WE ADOPT AND ADAPT JEWISH TRADITIONS FROM THE GRASSROOTS
- AS A RABBI, I WANT TO SAY “YES”

# Where is it legal?

-  Legal
-  Introduced



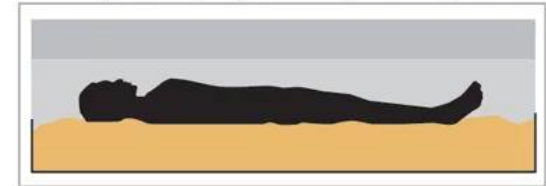
# WHAT IS NATURAL ORGANIC REDUCTION?

- Commonly known as “human composting” (also called “terramation”)
- "Natural organic reduction" means the contained, accelerated conversion of human remains to soil. (RCW 68.04.310)
- Based on common agricultural practice to compost dead livestock
- Researched and studied at Washington State University

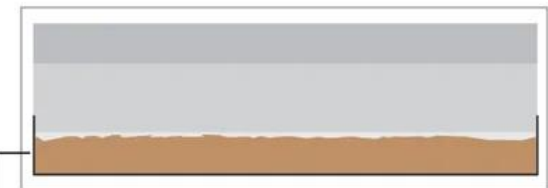
## How the natural organic reduction process works

**1.** The body is laid into a Recompose vessel, onto a bed of wood chips, alfalfa and straw, for 30 days. By controlling the amount of carbon, nitrogen, oxygen and moisture, the vessel creates the perfect environment for microbes and bacteria involved in decomposition.

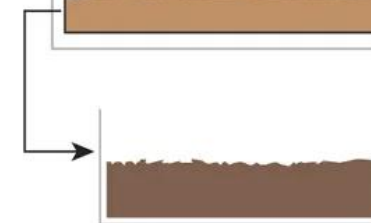
*Recompose vessel*  
Steel cylinder, 8 feet long and 4 feet tall.



**2.** After 30 days, all the organic material has been broken down into soil.

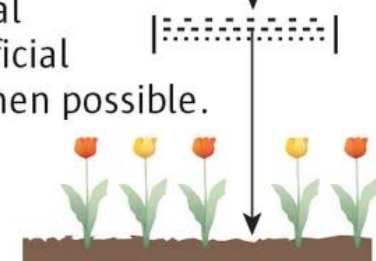


**3.** The fresh soil is removed to a curing bin for several more weeks to aerate.



**4.** After being aerated, the soil is screened to remove any nonorganics (such as metal fillings, pacemakers, prostheses and artificial joints). Nonorganic items are recycled when possible.

**5.** The finished soil is very similar to the topsoil bought at a local nursery.



Source: *Recompose*

MARK NOWLIN / THE SEATTLE TIMES

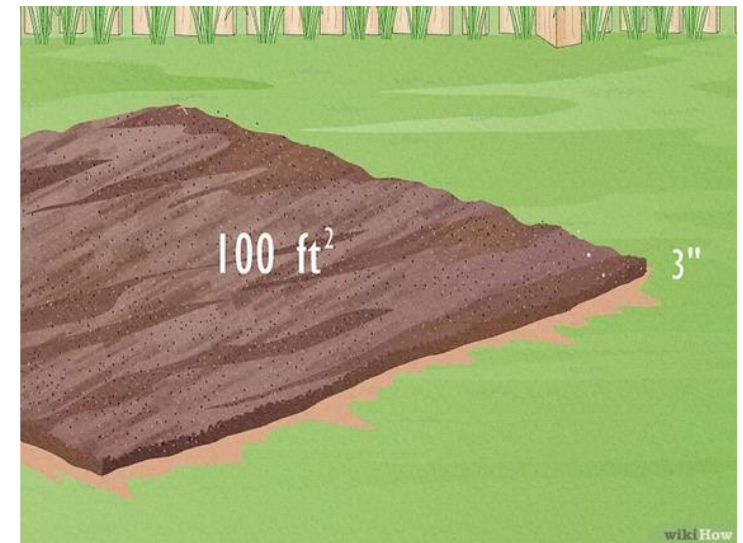
# WHAT IS NATURAL ORGANIC REDUCTION?



# CURRENT OPTIONS FOR DISPOSITION



1. Family receives compost and can use it how they like on private property
2. Conservation lands under contract with funeral home
3. Other public lands (with permission—dependent on state law)



Approx. 54 bags

## JUDAISM AND NOR



מְכַלְכֵּל חַיִּים בְּחַסְדֶּךָ  
מְחַיֶּה מֵתִים בְּרַחֲמִים רַבִּים  
סוֹמֵךְ נוֹפְלִים  
וְרוֹפֵא חוֹלִים  
וּמַתִּיר אֲסוּרִים  
וּמְקַיֵּם אֲמוּנָתוֹ לַיְשָׁנִי עֶפְרָיִם,  
מִי כָמוֹךָ בְּעֵל גְּבוּרוֹת  
וּמִי דוֹמֶה לָּךְ  
מֵלֶךְ  
מְמִית  
וּמְחַיֶּה  
וּמַצְמִיחַ יְשׁוּעָה:

You sustain the living with lovingkindness,  
You give the dead life with great mercy,  
You support the fallen  
and heal the sick;  
and free the captives  
and preserve Your faith with those asleep in  
the dust.

Who is like You, Master of mighty deeds?  
Who can be compared to You,  
O Ruler

Who causes death  
and restores life,  
and causes Your salvation to  
**grow/flourish/spring/SPROUT.**

כבוד המת  
אסור בהנאה  
בל תשחית

JEWISH VALUES  
TO INFORM THE  
CONVERSATION





**JEWISH QUESTIONS  
MOVING FORWARD:  
RITUAL STAGES AND  
OPPORTUNITIES**

Traditional Burial	NOR
<i>Goses</i>	<i>Goses</i>
Moment of Death	Moment of Death
<i>Taharah</i>	<i>Taharah</i>
<i>Shmirah</i>	<i>Shmirah</i>
<i>Levayah</i>	<i>Levayah</i>
<i>Kevurah</i>	Laying in Vessel
<i>Shiva</i>	<i>Shiva</i>
<i>Sheloshim</i>	<i>Sheloshim/Vessel to Curing</i>
	Receiving/Placing of Compost
<i>Yartzeit</i>	<i>Yartzeit</i>

## JEWISH QUESTIONS MOVING FORWARD: PREFERRED MODE OF DISPOSITION?



Importance of “place” or marker?

Preference for Jewish space/cemetery?

Limits on “use” of compost?

- Food vs. Ornamentals
- Private vs. Public Land

Need to keep all compost together, or OK to divide?