

Reason for the 4th Niwano Peace Prize Visionary Award



Rev. Gakugen Yoshimizu

Nationality: Japan

Birth: 1978

Position: Buddhist Priest of the Jodo Shu School, Kōshō-in Temple
Secretary General, Committee for Compassionate Social
Action *Hitosaji no Kai*

Deputy Representative, *Isenkai*: Jodo Shu Buddhist
Nembutsu Association

Religion: Buddhism

Rev. Gakugen Yoshimizu, a Buddhist priest of the Jodo Shu school, has for many years stood in solidarity with people experiencing poverty and homelessness, affirming the dignity and sanctity of their lives and putting the Buddhist spirit of compassion into concrete practice in society.

Born and raised in Sanya, Tokyo, Rev. Yoshimizu stepped forward to address the difficulties surrounding funerals and burial places for formerly homeless people without family or relatives. In 2008, following extensive discussions with support organizations and the people directly concerned, he helped establish the communal grave known as *Yui no Haka* ("Grave of Bonds"). The following year, together with other young Buddhist priests, he founded the 'Committee for Compassionate Social Action *Hitosaji no Kai*. As a central figure in the organization, he has continued to provide meals, conduct nighttime outreach, offer practical assistance and counselling, arrange funerals for people without family support, and hold memorial services in the Asakusa, Sanya, and Ueno areas of Tokyo.

Rev. Yoshimizu's work extends far beyond the provision of food and essential supplies. He meets people living on the streets at eye level, listens attentively to their voices, and embraces those isolated from society not merely as recipients of assistance, but as irreplaceable neighbors with whom we share our lives. He strives to safeguard their dignity to the very end, ensuring that each person is mourned and remembered as a human being, not only during life but also after death.

While pursuing the Buddhist path himself, Rev. Yoshimizu has walked alongside those who suffer with the hope of bringing them relief, however small, through his compassionate actions. His work is nothing less than the practice of the bodhisattva path: the embodiment of compassion not as an abstract ideal, but through concrete actions performed each day in society.

The Niwano Peace Foundation understands peace as meaning more than the mere absence of war and violence. At its foundation must be a society in which no person is abandoned and in which the life and dignity of every individual are respected. By confronting poverty, isolation, discrimination, and the loss of human ties even after death, and by restoring connections among people, Rev. Yoshimizu's work builds peace from the ground of everyday life.

Rev. Yoshimizu has also opened Buddhist temples to serve as resources for their local communities and developed a model of collaboration in which Buddhist priests, organizations supporting the disadvantaged, medical and social-welfare professionals, volunteers, and local residents work together with mutual respect for their individual roles. Through cooperation between religious practitioners and civil society, this initiative sustains a continuum of care encompassing the provision of meals, practical counselling, access to medical and welfare services, funerals, and memorial observances.

As a practical model of peacebuilding inspired by religious and spiritual principles, Rev. Yoshimizu's work has the potential to spread to other communities, religious practitioners, and civic associations. It deeply embodies the purpose of the Niwano Peace Prize Visionary Award, which honours pioneering, emerging, and experimental initiatives that address immediate and tangible human needs and contribute to the creation of a peaceful society.

In recognition of these outstanding achievements, and in the hope that Rev. Gakugen Yoshimizu's work will continue to develop, and that the practice of compassion and peace through cooperation between religious practitioners and the civic community will spread throughout society, we hereby confer upon him the 4th Niwano Peace Prize Visionary Award.