

## Yoga in Public Schools

Yoga is a spiritual discipline rooted in Hindu philosophy and is universally available to anyone without any coercion, pressure, or requirement to change one's religion. *Asana* is a component of Yoga, albeit the most physically-centered part, and means pose, posture, or manner of sitting. *Asana*, or postural practice, has been shown to tremendously benefit muscle tone, flexibility, blood pressure, back pain and arthritis, and the immune system. Studies have also shown that for children, the practice of *asana* may work to reduce Attention Deficit Disorder (ADHD), improve general behavior and grades.

Under the First Amendment, public schools *may* offer yoga-based programs, such as *asana*-only programs, as part of their curriculum because *asana* alone is not yoga. Public schools *should not* offer programs that go beyond the instruction of *asana* and other physical components of yoga. As such, community groups are free to offer more comprehensive yoga programs during non-school hours using school facilities on the same basis as other community groups sponsoring religious and secular programs for youth.

Many proponents of yoga in schools have argued that Hinduism (and by extension many of its practices) is not a religion, but a spiritual science or a way of life, and should thus fall out of the purview of the Establishment Clause. While there is truth to these descriptions, the argument falls short when the general understanding of religion in the framework of civil and human rights law is that it is a collection of sincerely held beliefs, worldviews, or cultural systems relating to existential questions such as the relationship between material existence (ie. humanity) and the supernatural or the purpose of life. In this context, Hinduism absolutely is a religion, although unique among the world's religions, as it has no identifiable beginning in history, no single founder or prophet, no central religious establishment or sole authoritative scripture and generally does not proselytize or seek conversion.

Accordingly, Hindus, as a group of peoples espousing the principles and practices of Hinduism as a religion, are entitled to the protections and bound by the prohibitions of laws pertaining to the freedom of and from religion.