

IYASE prop corner April 2020
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Paryankasana is a backbend that translates to “couch, bed or sofa.” In *Light on Yoga*, Guruji BKS Iyengar comments that it is a continuation of Supta Virasana (reclined hero’s pose). However, unlike Supta Virasana in which the aim is to lengthen the spine to be parallel to the floor, in Paryankasana the spine forms a tall arc and there is a mighty lift of the chest. Paryankasana can be challenging in a number of respects, but in this article, I show how you can use the support of a bolster and block to create more ease and support. The use of props is not only supportive; it is also instructive.

In the first image you can see my initial attempt at Paryankasana without any support.



I begin by sitting in Virasana and then I recline back and arc the spine to place the crown of my head on the floor. As BKS Iyengar instructs in *Light on Yoga*, no part of the trunk rests on the floor. Ultimately, the aim is for the forearms to rest on the floor while maintaining the backbend. However, you can see that my arms are well above the floor and that it is challenging to create the level of opening and strength in the shoulders to allow for the forearms to reach the floor.

However, working with supports creates the support for gradual opening and strength building in this asana. In the next image I have taken the



support of a bolster turned on its side, as well as a brick which can be used as support for the forearms.

With the support of the bolster, I sit in Virasana, and then pressing down with my forearms and elbows, I lift my chest, taking my upper middle back into my body for a backbend.

I then release my head to the floor, fold my arms, and rest my forearms on the brick. You can see how the shape of the bolster supports the arc of the chest and spine and that the brick provides a support for the arms, as well



as giving me something to reach for. With these supports in place, I can remain in Paryankasana longer and can therefore study the actions of the pose with less struggle.

In *Light on Yoga*, Guruji BKS Iyengar comments that the dorsal region is extended and therefore the lungs are expanded. The use of the bolster supports and encourages the extension of the spine and therefore more space is made for the lungs. Also, for those who struggle to get a full lift of the chest in this pose, the bolster gives you something to curl or backbend over, thus avoiding the flattening of the spine that can occur when attempting this asana.

In *Light on Yoga* Guruji suggests staying in this pose for a minute. While remaining in this pose, I work on allowing the roots of my thighs to sink toward the floor and I work on maintaining the lift in the chest and opening in the armpit/chest area while not hardening or tensing the head and neck.

If your head floats in the air when back bending over the bolster, you can use a brick or blanket for head support. To exit the pose, press your arms down into the bolster for support and lead with the chest to sit up. (If practicing Paryankasana without any props, you can exit through Supta Virasana).

In the final image, I have removed the bolster and now only use a brick for arm support. If you can maintain the arc of the spine and lift of the chest in Paryankasana, this is another way to work with prop support in this pose. You can see how you can experiment with the use of simple props to support your asana where it needs support and challenge yourself in the places you need challenging.

