

Parighasana (gate pose)

Pronounced par-eegh-aah-suh-nuh the word parigha means the cross-bar we use to close a gate in Sanskrit.

This pose is named the gate pose because the pose resembles the shape of the closing mechanism we often find upon gates.



Teaching Points:

- **Stage 1:** Adopt a raised kneeling position, keep the left thigh perpendicular to the ground, left hip staying forwards, as the bent right leg is drawn out to the right side, knee stacked over ankle in alignment with the right foot. Keep the core muscles engaged, activating mula bandha if possible.
- Stay here keeping the pelvis level, the groin open, ensuring the right knee does not fall inwards as you roll the top of the right thigh outwards. Can place the right hand across right thigh and left arm behind the back to get a sense of the opening of the groin and chest. If the right knee falls inwards due to tight hips/adductors etc. then allow the right foot to angle inwards to realign the knee. **Could stay here.** Inhaling, can raise upper arm if possible to experience a stretch along the left side. **If this is enough we could stay here.**
- **Stage 2:** To go more deeply, inhaling lengthen the spine and mindfully sidebend to the right side placing the lower hand to the inside of the lower leg to floor *or a support*, keeping the top shoulder back. Here the torso & lower arm will press against the inner thigh keeping it back, assisting the opening of the groin. Press down into the floor/support with the lower hand as we rotate the top shoulder back, opening the chest. If possible inhaling draw the top arm overhead creating one line of continuous effort along the top of the body; if possible look upwards past the armpit, otherwise look forwards or down. **We could stay here.**
- **Stage 3:** To go more deeply we can begin again with the right leg placed **straight** out to the right side, the thigh rolled outwards so the knee is facing upwards, the right foot can be flat or if necessary the toes can point upwards. *Avoid hyperextension of the knee, bending it a little or contracting quads as press firmly into the heel. Can keep straight leg foot pointing forwards to reduce activity at hip, often useful for low back and sacroiliac conditions.*
- Again we inhale lengthening spine, raising arms out to shoulder height, engaging the core and exhaling keeping the top shoulder back, the chest open and the groin open, we laterally fold to the right side placing the lower hand wherever it naturally falls upon the right leg, lifting up through the vertical right arm. Ensure the lower hand is not exerting pressure down into the knee. **We could stay here.**
- **Stage 4:** If we wish to make the pose more intense we can inhale and exhale lower the top arm over the top ear, palm facing downwards, looking upwards across the armpit if possible.



At every stage:

- Ensure knees, back and sacroiliac joints are comfortable
- Keep top shoulder back and chest open.
- Use the breath to explore the pose, keeping the body as open as possible at every stage
- **When we are ready to exit**, we take the top arm back to the vertical position and inhaling lifting arms back to shoulder height and exhaling lower arms to sides.

Note: for this posture there will be a wide range of natural ability to abduct the legs and externally rotate at the hips and as always students must honour that, practicing at the most appropriate stage **where the body remains open** – meaning a more upright position may be preferable!

Benefits:

- Frees ribcage & intercostal muscles, promotes free breathing
- Intensely tones abdominal muscles and organs
- Releases stiffness in chest and shoulders
- Tones the waist
- Releases stuckness in spinal column
- Increases circulation of prana, bringing vitality to body

Good preparation

Hip mobilisers, adductor & hip flexor stretches, twists, back mobilisers, chest openers, ankle mobilisers

Cautions & possible modifications

- Knee problems: place padding beneath the bent knee or if necessary use a standing alternative e.g. parsvakonsana, giving similar benefits.
- High blood pressure and heart conditions: keep the upper arm to the hip if staying.
- Back & sacroiliac conditions: limit the degree of lateral flexion, can place support under lower hand, keep outstretched leg foot forwards facing to remove the external hip rotation
- Shoulder injuries: caution, work to comfortable ROM
- Hyperextension of lead leg: keep micro bend in knee or can try to contract quads as press heel to floor

Simple versions and modifications

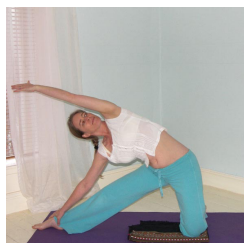
As noted above we can:

- use padding beneath knee or an alternative of a standing pose (e.g. parsvakonasana/trikonasana or seated pose (parvritti janusirsasana)
- keep the extended leg bent
- keep lead arm on thigh or a block/chair
- keep the upper arm lowered to our side
- look forwards or downwards



We can also practice with abducted leg foot placed forwards, closing the hip; this has the effect of reducing any possible flexion at the hips & twisting action of the spine.

Developments & Variations



We can work more deeply into the lateral stretch until perhaps palms meet, but here it is likely we will need to flex (bend) at the hips and use more rotation at the spine. Note: most sidebends also involve some rotation & flexion at the hips if we enter more deeply.

Adjustments

For this asana verbal instruction is ideal and mirroring can be useful. However we can alter the position of the upper arm if the hand is facing in the wrong direction or if the arm is not connecting down through the side of the body.

We can also place a hand lightly upon the lower shoulder blade and the other hand upon the top shoulder gently helping to rotate the torso and the top shoulder backwards.

It can be very helpful to ask students to also be aware of the lower side of the torso as this can prevent the torso shortening & 'sagging'. Alternatively we can gently place a hand on the top ribcage and invite a student to lengthen ribs away from the hand.