

Getting More Out of Pilates

By **Peggy Z. Protz, GCFT**

Throughout my whole life, it seems as if I have been on a mission to improve myself. I started dancing when I was five years old and continued professional training throughout high school and college. I worked hard at it—always in the studio—stretching, bending, and practicing. I was stumped, however, at how technique came so easily to those who seemed to never work hard.

In college, I discovered Pilates. It was 1989 in New York and my college had one of only a few Pilates studios in the New York City area at the time. Now, I'm sure, there are hundreds. I was attracted to the innovative machines and whole body philosophy. I thought this could be the answer to my quest for physical perfection. I was around the studio so much that I soon became an instructor and found myself teaching professional Broadway dancers, who were sometimes twice my age.

I was still far from satisfied with my own abilities, however. Various aches, pains, and stiffness led me to try any other technique or modality that promised relief. By this time I was in Seattle and was attending an *Awareness Through Movement* class. I was intrigued by how these often slow, small, and subtle movements not only offered relief from chronic tensions, but also gave me a feeling of integration and wholeness, that perhaps was what I was looking for.

I joined a four-year *Feldenkrais*® training in 1998. We met three times per year for 2- to 3-week intensive segments. After one particular segment, I was trying out some familiar Pilates moves on the “High Barrel.” I was performing a “swan dive,” a significant back bending movement where the goal is to touch and possibly walk down the wall behind you with your fingers. Back bending had never been easy for me and usually I would experience a level of resistance that I would have to push past before touching the wall. This time I practically bruised my fingers slamming swiftly and effortlessly into the wall!

What had happened? I hadn't practiced this move in months. Did I suddenly become Superwoman? Something was different. I felt more alive and integrated, yes, but after further reflection I realized that I could explain it another way. I was no longer working against myself. My intention to bend backwards did not have to fight against parts of me that had previously refused to bend. Other Pilates moves also felt more graceful and effortless—all without excessive work or practice!

My mission continues, but my experience with the *Feldenkrais Method* has changed my perspective. I have learned that more practice and hard work does not guarantee improvement. The *Feldenkrais* lessons offer me increased awareness and the opportunity to perceive myself moving with greater ease and elegance. This is something repetitive practice cannot provide. It may, in fact, be the essence of the perfection I seek.

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