

Pilates: Resistance Needed!

by Susan Brinkmann, OCDS



he blending of east and west into new fangled forms of exercise is all the rage these days. While some of these programs

outright encourage participation in non-Christian religious beliefs such as yoga and tai chi, others are less conspicuous and the discerning Christian will have to do a little digging to get at the truth.

Pilates is a good example. Originally called Contrology, pilates blends eastern exercise techniques with western resistance training to stretch, strengthen and balance the body. It encourages the use of the mind to control the muscles and focuses on an awareness of breathing, the alignment of the spine and strengthening the deep torso and abdominal muscles.

The inventor, Joseph Pilates, was a man whose fitness ideas were rooted in yoga, Zen meditation and ancient Greek and Roman physical regimes. He was also very committed to what has become a popular New Age concept known as the power of positive thinking.

“One of the major results of Contrology is gaining the mastery of your mind over the complete control of your body,” he wrote in his book, *Return to Life Through Contrology*.

Pilates was born in 1880 in Germany to a prize-winning Greek gymnast and a mother who practiced naturopathy. A sickly child, he resorted to body building, yoga and gymnastics to improve his health. By the time he reached adulthood, he was already well-advanced in the practice of physical fitness.

Just before World War I, Pilates was living as a German national in England

and making a living as a boxer, circus-performer and self-defense instructor. When war broke out, he was interned with other German citizens in a camp where he began to train inmates in his fitness program. It was here that the Contrology method began to take shape.

He immigrated to the United States around 1925 and it was during this journey that he met his wife Clara. The couple founded a studio in New York

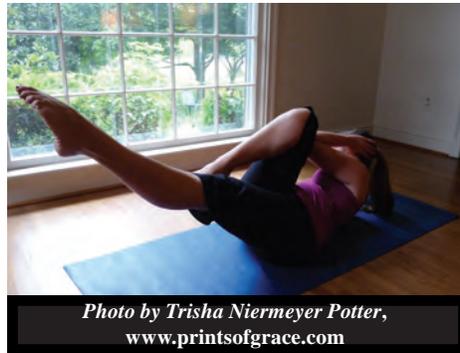


Photo by Trisha Niermeyer Potter, www.printsofgrace.com

City where they taught Contrology to students. Their studio thrived well into the 1960's and boasted many famous patrons such as well-known dancers George Balanchine and Martha Graham. Joseph Pilates died in 1967 at the age of 87.

The original version of Contrology, now known as pilates, has morphed into dozens of varieties, many of which incorporate New Age belief systems into the original concept.

For instance, “Modern pilates” is influenced by developments in therapeutic massage, osteopathy, the Feldendrais Method (a method of healthcare based on the belief that there is no separation between mind and body), and Butoh (a Japanese performance art).

“Yogalates” fuses yoga with pilates. “Expand your Self, move gently and celebrate the many possibilities which the union of Yoga and Pilates will reveal . . .” the website explains.

“Pilates with Chi” merges pilates with the same Taoist philosophy that underlies tai chi and qi gong and a pantheistic belief in a “universal life force energy” that permeates the universe.

Many Pilates instructors are heavily influenced by the New Age, such as the popular Ana Caban, whose website includes a link to organizations such as Gaiam, which is derived from the name of an ancient goddess known as Gai, or Mother Earth. “At Gaiam we believe that all of the Earth’s living matter, air, oceans and land form an interconnected system that can be seen as a single entity” the website states.

The discerning Christian may want to remember that in addition to its eastern components, pilates also relies very heavily on western resistance techniques, many of which work just as well – or better – than pilates. Free weights are the best resistance exercise for improving body tone, boosting the metabolic rate and improving bone density in post-menopausal women. Exercise tubing and bands are also excellent choices for resistance training.

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