

Pilates - Taiso Class Memo

Class 2 - , Exploring Reflexes, Balance, and Trust

Introduction

In our first class, we used simple movements to **reactivate primitive reflexes**, the natural foundations of human coordination. This was an assessment to see how everyone moved and to remind ourselves that diversity of age, ability, and background is a strength — it creates richness in our relationships.

Joseph Pilates' genius was his intuition: he insisted on **dynamic, natural movement** when most of his contemporaries promoted rigid, tensed-limb exercise. Modern neuroscience has confirmed that rigid movement increases sympathetic stress, stiffens joints, and reduces sensory awareness, while supple, reflex-based movement promotes neuroplasticity and resilience.

As Pilates wrote:

“Look at the animals in the wild. They move with grace, agility, and natural rhythm. It is this natural suppleness and control which we must regain.”
(*Your Health*, 1934, p. 27)

Moshe Feldenkrais echoed the same idea decades later:

“If you know what you are doing, you can do what you want. Awareness through movement restores our ability to act with ease.”
(*Awareness Through Movement*, 1972, p. 16)

The Program and Its Principles

1. Running Slowly

How: We explored slow running, letting gravity carry us forward.

Why: Warms up dynamically, activates postural reflexes, and strengthens the arches of the feet.

Pilates: *“Running and Skipping stimulate circulation, strengthen the arches of the feet, and invigorate the body. They demand rhythm, coordination, and vitality.”*
(*Return to Life Through Contrology*, 1945)

Feldenkrais: *“The quality of movement is improved not by effort, but by the organisation of the act as a whole.”*

(The Potent Self, 1985, p. 55)

2. Hopping on One Leg, Then the Other

How: Gentle hops, alternating legs, letting the hip drop naturally.

Why: Trains balance, reduces unnecessary upper-body tension, and improves bone strength.

Pilates: *“Contrology is not confined to a series of exercises; it is the complete coordination of body, mind, and spirit.”*

(Your Health, 1934, p. 20)

Feldenkrais: *“When balance is improved, effort disappears, and movement becomes graceful.”*

(The Master Moves, 1984, p. 77)

3. Seiza Stand-Ups (20 repetitions)

How: From kneeling (seiza), rise to standing and return.

Why: Reinforces primitive “stand-up” reflexes, strengthens legs and hips, integrates posture with breathing.

Pilates: *“Correct your false postures now and prevent the tendency to acquire bad habits.”*

(Return to Life Through Contrology, Preface)

Feldenkrais: *“We act in accordance with our self-image. By refining our image, we refine the act of standing, sitting, walking.”*

(Awareness Through Movement, 1972, p. 13)

4. The V-Shape (Teaser)

How: Sit, lift legs and back into a V, hold 30 seconds.

Why: Trains abdominal strength, spinal stability, and concentration.

Pilates: *“Contrology teaches you how to gain complete control of your body and through it balance of mind.”*

(Your Health, 1934, p. 19)

Feldenkrais: *“The nervous system learns best from small differences; the sense of balance improves by gently disturbing it.”*

(Awareness Through Movement, 1972, p. 61)

Variation: Lower legs and back close to floor without touching — dynamic *Teaser* — for endurance and spinal control.

5. Scissors

How: Rest on elbows, alternate legs in a scissor motion (30 reps).

Why: Improves hip flexor strength, abdominal tone, and rhythm.

Pilates: *“Contrology develops the body uniformly... invigorates the mind, and elevates the*

spirit.”

(Return to Life, 1945, Preface)

Feldenkrais: *“Good posture can be defined as free movement of the head, eyes, and limbs in all directions without strain.”*

(The Elusive Obvious, 1981, p. 40)

6. All Fours with Kick (*Mawashi Geri-inspired*)

How: On all fours, pivot arms to one side, lift opposite leg in a controlled arc, follow foot with eyes and head.

Why: Coordinates head, eyes, and limbs; strengthens hips and spine; teaches cross-pattern integration.

Pilates: *“Keep your eyes on the toes as you raise and lower the legs. This will help you maintain control, rhythm, and balance.”*

(Return to Life, 1945, Control Balance)

Feldenkrais: *“Movement with the eyes is inseparable from movement of the head and the rest of the body.”*

(The Master Moves, 1984, p. 92)

7. Partner Teaser Balance

How: One holds the V-Shape while the partner gently destabilises by pushing head, knees, or legs.

Why: Builds reflexive balance, resilience, and playful awareness.

Pilates: *“By reawakening thousands of otherwise dormant muscle cells, Contrology enables the nervous system to bring the body into balance.”*

(Return to Life, 1945)

Feldenkrais: *“Learning is turning insecurity into security through exploration.”*

(Awareness Through Movement, 1972, p. 83)

8. The Windmill

How: From the V-Shape, fix your gaze on a focal point. Pivot while keeping that point in sight. Legs swing backward, rolling you onto your hip, then belly, continuing the spin until you return to V-Shape.

Why: Trains coordination, rotation, balance, and core strength through dynamic transitions.

Pilates: *“Contrology teaches you how to gain complete control of your body and through it balance of mind.”* (*Your Health*, 1934, p. 19)

Feldenkrais: *“The nervous system learns best through differentiating direction and orientation. Rotation refines balance.”* (*Awareness Through Movement*, 1972, p. 101)

9. Look at the Sky

How: On all fours, lift opposite arm and leg. Pivot the raised leg behind you to open the body, projecting the belly upward until facing the ceiling. Keep the body flat, resisting the

tendency to sag.

Why: Strengthens the core, improves cross-lateral coordination, challenges balance.

Pilates: *“Never throw your head about. Keep your eyes focused and direct your movements in rhythm with your breathing.”* (Return to Life, 1945)

Feldenkrais: *“When the body learns to organise itself in unusual orientations, fear disappears and balance expands.”* (Body and Mature Behavior, 1949, p. 58)

10. Partner Trust Balance

How: One partner stands forward, supported from behind at the shoulder blades, gently leaning back as support is gradually released.

Why: Teaches trust, reduces fear of falling, and cultivates balance awareness.

Pilates: *“Contrology is designed to give you suppleness, natural grace, and skill that will be unmistakably reflected in the way you walk, play, and work.”* (Return to Life, 1945, Preface)

Feldenkrais: *“Anxiety is inseparable from the fear of falling. Balance is learned only when we feel safe enough to risk instability.”* (Body and Mature Behavior, 1949, p. 36)

Closing

We finished with gentle running — returning to where we began, but now with deeper awareness of rhythm, balance, and coordination.

Joseph Pilates and Moshe Feldenkrais, though from different traditions, both taught that **movement is not about force but about intelligence**. By practicing dynamically — running, hopping, rolling, rotating, and balancing — we train not just our muscles, but our nervous system.

That is the essence of Pilates—Taiso.

See you in the next class,

Yann Ao'Drenn