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Regain your footing with martial arts.

BY KERRI ALLEN

Euripides once said, “The best and safest thing is to keep a balance in your life.” Nearly 2,500 years later, we still strive for balance—in our diets, our budgets, our bodies. By looking to martial arts for kickbacks from ancient wisdom, many people find themselves regaining their footing, both physically and mentally.

Martial arts practices can be divided into two categories: external or “hard,” like karate and judo, which focus on strength and force, and the internal or “soft” arts, like t'ai chi and qigong, which emphasize mental coordination and relaxation. While people often perceive the external arts as violent or designed solely for self-defense, when practiced with mindfulness, they can produce the same spiritual benefits of the soft arts.

“When I looked in the mirror, I was crooked. I was a corkscrew,”

David Nijankin recalls. Before he started practicing karate, the 41-year-old father of two reluctantly lived with a physical imbalance caused by college sports injuries. After 20 years of chronic back pain, countless prescription drugs, and appointments with medical specialists, he felt defeated. But just a few weeks after enrolling in a shorinjiryu karatedo class that fo-

He practiced karate with John Mirrione Jr., an internationally acclaimed sensei who runs Harmony By Karate in New York City. His dojo is different than most in the US, Mirrione says, because of the spiritual philosophy behind every move. “It’s not about learning to beat someone up,” he says. “The discipline is in the silent meditation. You want to be in the best meditative state

A recent study showed that t'ai chi significantly helps improve physical balance.

cused equally on spiritual balance and physical strength, Nijankin changed. “Now, my core is stronger, my stride is longer, I stand up taller,” he says. “It has been transformational.”

to rid yourself of fear. That’s the harmonious aspect of this art.”

According to the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, martial arts practitioners between the ages of 40 and 60 display