

Holy day services promote empathy

Forgiveness and atonement took on special meaning as Jews observed Yom Kippur this year.

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Yom Kippur services, which were held around the country on Wednesday night and Thursday, drew record crowds. The Jewish Day of Atonement, which is usually a day of forgiveness, also became a time to reflect on the tragedies of the last few weeks.

Jennifer Burcholz, president of MU's Jewish Student Organization, said that since the attacks on America, she feels closer to God and has felt a spiritual strengthening.

People of all religious backgrounds have said they have experienced a similar strengthening of faith.

According to a Gallup poll taken last week, 88 percent of people surveyed said religion is very important or fairly important in their lives. Of those who said it was important, 64 percent said it was very important, the highest in the Gallup poll since before 1978.

Additionally, the Gallup poll indicated that 47 percent of Americans had attended church or synagogue in the week following the attacks, which is the highest since March 1994.

Rabbi Yossi Feintuch of Congregation Beth Shalom believes that more people are turning back to God because secular culture finds it easier and more natural to commemorate such events, like those of the past month, along the lines of religious language.

Feintuch used those events to help people understand Yom Kippur. He created many parallels between a speech by New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, which stressed that New York will withstand this event, and how Jews withstood oppression for many years.

Michael Bellman of Congregation Beth Shalom said Yom Kippur is a day of asking forgiveness and said it is always a struggle. He said this year will be even harder.

"We will ask if we can forgive what people have done, and it will be a struggle," Bellman said.