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Ambrosia - the nectar sustenance of the Greek pantheon - consisted of a fermented honey that granted immortality to all lips it touched. An earthly counterpart was consumed throughout the ancient Aegean world as an entheogen, a psychoactive substance used in religious ceremonies. Of course, worshipers also inebriated themselves with the "gift of the vines," loving wine to the point of creating an entire deity, Dionysus, to personify and exalt the experience. Like the ancients, modern society still reveres alcohol and this is nowhere more evident than a college campus.

Advertisements glamorize it. Movies idolize it. And upper classmen proselytize it. Today's "Greeks" no longer favor wine, usually preferring an icy keg to a cooled merlot. Apollo no longer serenades the hedonism with his lyre; A-Kon entertains with harmonic instructions to hit the dance floor. Yet the spirit of sacredness transcends these differences. The collegiate rite of passage from childhood to independence is consecrated with beer and liquor, and typically the next four years are drenched with the sacrament.

It was in this world of alcohol worship that I found myself emerged at the onset of my freshmen year. My high school experience with it had been relatively mild; whether because it was harder to get or the restrictions of living at home, drinking had always been an occasional social thing and usually handled responsibly. Yet as I entered the door of my first college party, I soon realized the rules had changed. Crowded within the fraternity house were hundreds of people, each unfamiliar face covered with a plastic cup. The mass swarmed rhythmically to the music, grinding against each other and screaming ecstatically. I could only marvel at the debauchery of the whole scene and at my own awkward anxiety, a feeling I hadn't experienced since my first day of middle school. "I should get a beer," I thought.

Outside on the patio, the revelations kept coming. The poor keg was being bombarded on all sides, like the climax of an old zombie movie in which the last uninfected holdouts try in vain to defend against the living dead's circumscribed attack. All rules of civility and courtesy had evaporated as each eager drinker pushed and shoved his cup toward the hose. Arbitrating the altar was a Greek who went about his task with solemnity, his backward hat demarking his reverence, like a Yakama or miter. I could almost make out his homage to the party gods as he filled each chalice: "Bless this brew, and the good people at Rolling Rock who made it, in Beer's name we pray." I quickly consumed my first cup, but the nagging outsider feeling remained. I longed for the cavalier attitude of my fellow partiers. After several more beers, and millions of closed synapses, a smile was plastered across my face; I knew no fear, could perform any feat of strength, and could woo any girl with my endless supply of witticisms. I, too, felt like a god.

I danced with alacrity I had never known. Complete strangers were now the closest of friends. And I was smug with the confidence that I was the coolest guy there. But the feeling didn't last. As the inebriation waned, the warm glow that was the party faded into a sadder scene. My sobered mind perceived the bonds I had formed with my peers as nothing more than superficial ties. The girl I had so fervently danced with was no more than a temporary physical connection. And the party itself had been as shallow as the pool of beer sloshing liquid in my near empty red cup. At later parties, I attempted to medicate this feeling with more and more alcohol, but the harder I reached for that godly perspective, the further and further it slipped from my grasp.

An alien race observing earth might find alcohol as one of our most bizarre social customs. It dampens our intellect and ability to reason, the things we value most during day light. Simultaneously, it debases us to our primal ancestors, transforming the most groomed and peaceful into the most sloppy and violent. Many have pointed the finger at peer pressure, misinformation, or the forbidden fruit mentality society has given it. But it is my contention that the

issue goes much deeper than this. Alcohol has become an idolization, bounding people together under the banner of inebriation, yet simultaneously tearing away each individual from their identity and sense of self. In order to combat its prominence, we must debunk, defuse, and deritualize it. This perhaps is the boon of alcohol edu and programs like it; it engenders introspection and internalizes information, forcing students to approach alcohol on an individual basis instead of the groupthink view associated with communal experience. The question of self, one's values, limits, and aspirations, is corroded by alcohol. Yet through education and self reflection, we can tear alcohol from its altar once and for all.