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## Aztec Fasts

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# AZTEC FASTS

By Charles E. Dibble

**F**ASTING was a common religious practice among the Aztecs. In order to insure divine favor, a variety of fasts was practiced. An early writer on the customs of the Aztecs, Bernardino de Sahagun, describes some of the regulations of the theological college (Calmeac).

"The twelfth [regulation] was that when it was a day of fasting, everybody, both young and old, fasted; they



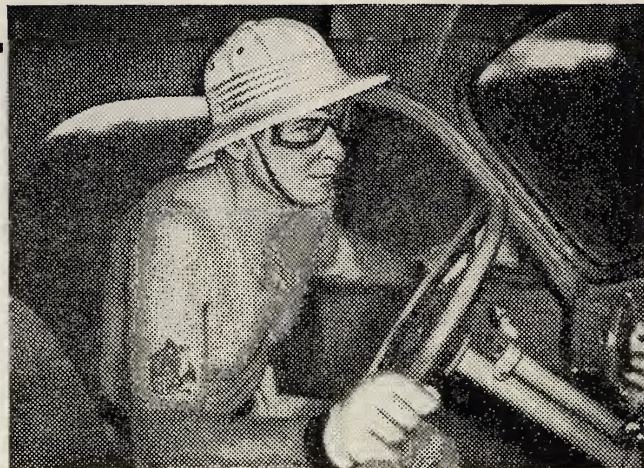
*Aztec manuscripts always picture a fasting person seated within an enclosure which represents a house.*

did not eat until mid-day, and when they came to a fast called the *Atamalqualo* they ate only bread and water. On other fast days they did not eat until midnight and then fasted again until the following midnight. Some ate only once a day—at mid-day—for they did not choose to take anything at night—not even water—for it was said that if they partook of anything or drank water they broke the fast."

In the Aztec cult the many priests practiced a variety of duties. In another passage, Sahagun describes the activities of a priestly group especially associated with the practice of fasting:

"This *Acolnauacatl Acolmiztli* was charged with providing all the necessities when the chief or king was to fast at the fiesta of Tlaloc (god of rain), and in the fast to the sun and in the fast of the month *Quecholli*, all of which are very solemn fasts. They provided the dress and equipment, etc., that the chief was to use in these fasts."

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