The festival of the makahiki was one the happiest ceremonies of the year. Its beginning was announced each year by the kāhuna when they first observed the rising of the Pleiades (Makali‘i) over the eastern horizon at sunset. This was about the middle of October, or during the kapu days of Kū, month of ‘Ikuwā by the lunar calendar in use in pre-European days on the island of Hawai‘i. (Malo, 1951 p.141 and note p. 151; also Handy, 1972 pp. 330-331) Because of changes through the centuries, these dates do not correspond to those in the Hawaiian Moon Calendar distributed by the Prince Kūhiō Civic Club and other Hawaiian Calendars on the market.

During Makahiki a kapu was placed on war, ceremonies in the temples ceased and all unnecessary work stopped. The preparation and serving of food continued, of course, but such work as house and canoe building, making of kapa and lau hala products and the planting of crops was suspended for the four-month festival period.

The people assembled the tributes which they were to present to their high chief as taxes when he or his representative visited their district. Since the Makahiki was a harvest festival the products of the gardens and plantations were of special significance. The flesh foods offered were dogs, fowls, fish, and other edible sea creatures. (Hogs, a form of Lono, were not suitable). From the gardens came taro, sweet potatoes, bananas, breadfruit, yams, arrowroot, coconuts, and sugar cane.

Since many of the foods were perishable they were received as a tribute to the high chief, then distributed to the members of the party which traveled with him, his court and his kāhuna. (Handy, 1972, p. 350). The workers who presented these gifts understood that they were to receive in return the blessings of the chief (and through him the blessings of the gods) which would assure them a year of good crops, sufficient rain, and general prosperity and happiness.

Gifts of a more durable nature presented to the chiefs consisted of kapa, mats, and many articles fashioned from wood. Some of these were taken to the chief’s storehouse.

The Makahiki was a time when men, women, and chiefs rested and abstained from all work, either farm or elsewhere. It was a time of entire freedom from labor.

The people did not engage in the usual religious observances during this time, nor did the chiefs; their worship consisted in making offerings of food. The king himself abstained from work on the Makahiki days.

There were four days during which every man, having provided himself with the means of support during his idleness, reposed himself at his own home.

After these four days of rest were over, every man went to his farm, or to his fishing, but nowhere else (not to mere pleasure seeking), because the Makahiki tabu was not yet ended, but merely relaxed for those four days. It will be many days before the Makahiki will be noa, there being four moons in that festival, one moon in Kau, and three moons in Hoolio.

“Welcome now to you, O Lono!” (E weli ia oe Lona, ea!) Then the kahuna and the people following the idol called out, “Nauane, nauane” (moving on, moving on). Again the kahuna from within the house called out, “Welcome to you, O Lono!” and the people with the idol answered “Moving on, moving on!” (nauane, nauane). Thereupon the kahuna from within the house called out, “This way, come in!” (Hele mai a komo, hele mai a komo.)

