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DISCOURSE

DELIVERED, JULY 5. 1802.

IN COMMEMORATION OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

BY NATHANAEL EMMONS, D. D.

Pastor of the Church in Franklin.

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SECOND EDITION.

WRENTHAM, (Mass.)  
PRINTED BY NATHANIEL HEATON, JUN.

1802.

AT a Meeting of a number of Inhabitants of the Towns of Franklin, Medway, and Bellingham, at Adams' Hall in Franklin, July 5. 1802.

Voted, that *Mr. Hanan Metcalf, Dr. Nathaniel Miller, and Mr. Oliver Smith*, be a Committee to wait upon the Rev. NATHANAEL EMMONS, D. D. and thank him for his excellent and pertinent Discourse, delivered in Commemoration of our national Independence, and to request a Copy for the press.

Attest, ASA HARDING,  
*Clerk of the Meeting.*

GENTLEMEN, I

I have no scruple in consenting to the publication of the Discourse, which has obtained your approbation; and I only regret, I was unable to place its leading sentiments in a clearer and stronger light.

I am, with much Respect,

Gentlemen,

your obedient Servant.

N. EMMONS.

*Franklin, July 6. 1802.*



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# DISCOURSE.

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EXODUS XII. 14.

*This day shall be unto you for a Memorial.*

**N**OTHING can be more correspondent with the joyful occasion upon which we are convened, than this passage of divine inspiration. It contains the express command of God to his ancient people, to commemorate, every year, the auspicious day of their national independence. From a single family, in the course of about four hundred years, they rose into a numerous and independent nation. They were of the seed of Abraham in the line of Isaac and Jacob. The darling son of this pious patriarch was carried into Egypt, where he was raised to superior power, and where he became the happy instrument of preserving his father's family, who rapidly increased to a numerous people. During the life of Joseph, his infant nation were extremely prosperous and happy; but, some time after

after his death, they found themselves in a very wretched condition. There arose a king in Egypt, who knew not Joseph, and who attempted to diminish the growing population and strength of the children of Israel. Among other arbitrary acts, he set over them certain officers, who treated them with intolerable rigor and severity; but the more they sighed, and groaned, and complained, the more they were oppressed by their unfeeling masters. At length, the God of Israel heard their groanings, and raised up a deliverer. Moses was born, and providentially preserved, educated, and prepared to execute the gracious design of Heaven. God vouchsafed to speak to him face to face, and give him authority to go to the king of Egypt, and demand deliverance for his chosen people. Though diffident and reluctant, he accepted the divine appointment, and undertook his important and arduous work. He repeatedly applied to Pharaoh, and repeatedly met with a repulse; but being clothed with divine authority and miraculous power, he brought such a series of sore and wasting judgments upon him and his subjects, that he finally gave his full consent, that the people of God should leave his kingdom, and return to the country from which they came. This was the joyful day of their Independence; and this day God appointed as a standing Memorial of that great and happy event.

The causes and circumstances, which concurred to bring about the independence of the Israelites, are so similar to the causes and circumstances, which concurred to bring about the American Revolution, that we may justly conclude, there is a peculiar propriety, in commemorating the Birth-Day of our national existence. Many instances might be adduced from scripture, to illustrate this conclusion. God sanctified the sabbath, for a memorial of the great work of creation. He appointed the bow in the clouds, for a memorial of his preserving Mercy to Noah and his family in the midst of a perishing world. He ordained, that the pot of manna and Aaron's rod which budded, should be kept as perpetual tokens of his special kindness and awful justice. He likewise commanded his people, whom he conducted through Jordan upon dry ground, to take stones from the bottom of the river, and raise a lasting monument of that miraculous interposition in their favor. Justly reasoning from such instances as these, Mordecai, with the express approbation of Esther the queen, appointed the days of Purim, to commemorate the great deliverance of the Jews from the hand of Haman. Each of these cases exactly applies to the case before us, and completely illustrates the *Propriety* of commemorating the Day, upon which we took the rank, and claimed the character of a free and independent Nation.

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But what I further propose in the present discourse is, to point out some of the important purposes, which may be answered, by keeping up the remembrance of this great and interesting event.

First, it must have a tendency to give us a realizing sense of the overruling hand of God, in all that takes place in the moral, as well as, in the natural world. While we observe the common course of nature, which is no other than the common course of providence, in producing similar effects in a similar manner, from day to day and from year to year; we are extremely prone to lose a realizing sense of that invisible hand, which governs all natural causes and moral agents. But when God comes out of his place, and shakes kingdoms and nations, by sudden and unexpected revolutions, we are constrained to awake from our stupidity, and "to know that he is the LORD," who governs the world. The visible manifestation of his overruling hand in such uncommon and extraordinary events, strikes us with a strong conviction, that others more common and ordinary, are equally under his constant and controlling influence. Nothing is more easy and familiar to our minds, than to trace causes into all the variety and multiplicity of their effects. When we recollect and contemplate any great and unusual event, we naturally conclude, not only that the hand of God was in that, but in every other event,

vent, which appears to have been intimately or remotely connected with it. Who can contemplate and realize the hand of God in the work of creation, without realizing his hand in upholding and governing the world, from that day to this? Who can contemplate and realize the hand of God in the destruction of Pharaoh and the redemption of Israel, without realizing, that he governs the kingdoms of men, and gives them to whomsoever he will? Hence a standing memorial of that great event, was wisely calculated to give the people of God a realizing sense of his universal providence. Accordingly, he directed them, when they celebrated the day of their deliverance, to rehearse in the ears of their children, the evils they suffered and the scenes they saw in the land of Egypt; and to recount the great and distinguishing blessings, which flowed from that memorable interposition of providence in their favor. This could hardly fail of causing both them and their children, to acknowledge and realize the hand of God in all events.

The same important purpose may be answered, by keeping alive the remembrance of the eventful day of our national Independence. The hand of God was clearly displayed in preparing the way, in raising up the instruments, and supplying the means, for the American Revolution. Though no miracles were wrought in our favor, as in the case of Israel; yet

yet those in the cabinet and those in the field were favored with the peculiar smiles and influence of Heaven. And though the armies of our enemies were not plunged in the mighty ocean, yet they were one after another, by a remarkable concurrence of causes, delivered into our hands. Who, then, can either recollect or contemplate the commencement of our Independence, without realizing the hand of God in that great event, and in the surprising train of consequences, which have flowed from it? If any thing can prevent the general spread of atheism and infidelity in this favored land, it seems the commemorating the day of our national preservation and independence is calculated to produce the desirable effect. This is one very valuable purpose to be answered, by recognizing the hand of God in making us a distinct and independent nation.

Secondly, the recalling to remembrance the auspicious day of our separation from great Britain, is suited to fill our hearts with gratitude for all the public and private, civil and religious blessings, which we now enjoy. A stream of every kind of knowledge and a stream of every kind of wealth, has been flowing in upon us, in consequence of assuming a national character. Our independence has not only enlarged our borders to a vast extent; but also opened a free intercourse with all the commercial world. Our wealth and knowledge are not  
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only doubled, but the means of increasing these, are tenfold increased. We have, perhaps, more extensive and promising prospects before us, than any other people on the globe. And though at present, a thick and dark cloud is hovering over us; yet there is reason to believe, that the blessings of our independence will extend and increase to the latest generations. Now, all these blessings in enjoyment and in prospect, may be traced up to that memorable day, which gave us an independent station among the nations of the earth. And in contemplating the great goodness of God, in such a signal interposition in our favor, we are prepared to discern his loving kindness and tender mercy in all the happy fruits, which we have long been reaping from it. It must be, therefore, both pleasing and useful, to preserve and perpetuate the memory of our national Birth-Day, which has produced, and still promises, so much benefit to this western world.

Thirdly, there is another good purpose to be answered, by the frequent recollection of the day, which disconnected us from the British parliament; and that is, to teach us how to support and preserve our own excellent government, which we have happily adopted in consequence of that disconnection. To illustrate the truth of this observation, you will permit me to unfold, in the most conspicuous manner, the *governing motives, and fundamental principles,*

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which conspired to bring about our separation from Great Britain. These things, of late years, have been greatly misunderstood by some, and greatly misrepresented by others. I will endeavor, therefore, to set these points in a true and clear light.

It has been justly observed by a judicious and elegant author, "that our Independence was found by those who fought it not." At the commencement of our controversy with the mother country, we had not the least desire nor intention of becoming independent. We had no objection against the peculiar Form of the British government. We highly approved and admired it. All our complaints arose from its corrupt administration. We justly supposed, that those in power were arbitrary and unconstitutional, in presuming to tax us, without our consent, for the purpose of raising a national Revenue, from which we were to derive no part of the benefit. This we viewed as unjust and oppressive, because it was promoting the interest of one part of the nation, at the expence and injury of the other. To avoid this unreasonable burden, which for aught we knew, might be increased from year to year and from age to age, we complained and remonstrated, and finally petitioned to be exempted from taxation upon the ground of having no representation in the British parliament. This indulgence we could not obtain by these means, and  
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therefore we resolved to use others. Accordingly we presumed to exercise our original and independent right to suspend our commercial intercourse with Great Britain. This was considered by the mother country as undutiful and refractory conduct; which drew upon us greater oppression, and finally the charge of rebellion. We were then constrained to take up arms in our own defence. But still we were ready to lay them down, on condition, that Britain would relinquish her claim to tax us in all cases whatsoever without our consent. So that for some time after the war commenced, we had no thoughts of declaring Independence; or if any did think of it, they thought of it as a case of necessity, not of choice. Hence it clearly appears, that it was solely owing to the arbitrary measures of the British parliament, that we formed and executed the Resolution of becoming a separate and independent people.

It is now easy to ascertain what were not, as well as what were, the fundamental principles of our late Revolution. They were not the principles of a pure monarchy; for we did not wish to place all civil power in one man's hand. They were not the principles of a pure aristocracy; for we saw no safety in committing all civil power to a nobility, or to the hands of a few rich and great men. They were not the principles of a pure democracy; for

we foresaw the danger of lodging all civil power in the hands of one large body, or popular assembly. What then were the fundamental principles of the Revolution? The true and proper answer is, *they were the principles of a mixt and duly ballanced government, composed of three distinct orders or branches.* Of the truth of this assertion, we have the most plain and incontestable evidence. At the time of the declaration of independence, there was not a single monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy, in the thirteen United States. In every State, a mixt government was established, consisting of a Governor, a body of Senators or Assistants, and a house of Representatives. And until the Federal Constitution was adopted, all the State governments were entirely distinct, without any other bond of union, than that of a Confederation. From these facts it is evident, that the Continental Congress, when they declared the United States independent, adopted *no new principles*, and established *no new form*, of government. They meant only to dissolve the connection between Great Britain and these Colonies, and leave the latter in the full enjoyment of the same *liberty and order*, which they had long before enjoyed. Nothing was farther from their intention, than to introduce a loose, wild, frantic democracy, which should free the people from all restraint, and let them all upon a level. In every instance, in which  
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this democratic spirit appeared, our wisest and best men bore a bold and public testimony against it. When any insurrection arose in this or any other State in the Union, it was immediately and effectually suppressed, by the arm of government. Neither our rulers, nor the sober and judicious part of our citizens, had the least idea of modern *liberty* and *equality*. This was more fully demonstrated, when some of our best informed Civilians met in Convention, to frame the Federal Constitution. They were all united in the opinion, that a mixt government, composed of three Branches, as checks upon each other, was absolutely the best. Accordingly they framed such a mixt and duly balanced government, and recommended it to the acceptance of the People, who actually adopted it. And here it is worthy of particular notice, that some of the same men, who were principally concerned in the Declaration of Independence, were also principally concerned in forming the Federal Constitution. It may suffice to mention JOHN ADAMS, and BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, who subscribed both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the Federal Government. The public conduct of these men, in bringing about the Revolution, and in forming the Federal Constitution, and of one of them in administering it, together with the public conduct of the majority of the nation, affords infallible evidence,

evidence, that the fundamental principles of the Revolution, were no other than the principles of a mixt government, which bears the nearest resemblance to the British Constitution. All the political publications previous to, and in favor of, the Revolution, which I have had opportunity of reading, except the Crisis of Thomas Paine, maintain the principles of a free, firm, mixt government. The American people never professed to embrace the *democratic* principles of Nedham, Turgot, Condorcet, and Thomas Paine; but have been almost universally in favor of the principles, which lie at the foundation of the Federal Constitution. These are the pure, genuine principles of the Revolution; and these are the only sound principles of civil government, which ought to be kept in perpetual remembrance. In this view and to answer this purpose, a standing memorial of our Independence is not only proper, but very useful and important. If we ever forget, or renounce, the principles of the Revolution, we shall certainly subject ourselves to the great evils of either monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy. To the last mentioned evils, we seem at present, to be most immediately exposed. It has now, therefore, become necessary to look back to the fundamental principles of the Revolution. These are the proper criterion to determine, whether those in administration are pursuing measures to *support*, or to *destroy* the

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the general government. There is no step better calculated, perhaps, to preserve and perpetuate all our civil and religious privileges, than to recognize, vindicate, and transmit to future ages, the grand and fundamental principles, upon which we declared our Independence, and built our Federal Constitution. This, if any thing, must eventually restore peace and harmony to the present professedly *united*, but actually *divided* States. Could we only agree to adopt the very principles of our Independence, there is scarcely a doubt, but that we should soon have such men in administration, as would render the government acceptable to the people in general, and formidable to all foreign powers. Thus it appears, that a frequent recollection of the day of our national Independence, may have a happy tendency to teach us our dependence upon God, our obligations to him, and the importance of maintaining the free and efficient government, which we still enjoy, but are in danger of losing.

A few pertinent and just deductions from what has been said, shall now close the discourse.

This subject clearly shows us, in the first place, why we conducted our Revolution with so much more moderation and success, than the French conducted theirs. At their first setting out to obtain civil and religious freedom, we generally supposed

in this country, that they intended to tread in our steps and imitate our example, which led us to applaud and patronize their zealous exertions; but they have long since given us abundant evidence of our egregious and dangerous mistake. Their political principles and ultimate designs were subversive of all civil and religious order. Instead of merely seeking to free themselves from oppression, and to ameliorate their own government, their grand object was, to introduce UNIVERSAL DEMOCRACY, and involve the world in anarchy and confusion. They were as much opposed to the principles of our revolution, as to the principles of the British government, which they strenuously endeavored to overturn. Condorcet, who was one of the first and ablest friends to their revolution, and who wrote in favor of it, expressly says, the Americans are far behind the French in political knowledge; and to support his assertion, appeals to our Federal Constitution, which is built upon the principles of a mixt government, composed of three orders. In opposition to this, he maintained that to be the best form of government, which consists of one body, or a pure democracy; and so did the other French writers in favor of their revolution. Hence it is evident, that the French Revolution was begun and carried on for a long time, *upon democratic principles*, which were entirely different from the sound principles



principles of the American revolution. And it was owing to such democratic principles, that they furiously went on making and unmaking one constitution after another, and spreading misery and destruction among themselves, and among surrounding and distant nations, until Bonaparte gave them a constitution, which they found they could not so easily alter. The French acted from motives and principles, which had a direct tendency to destroy all religion and government; but we acted from motives and principles, which were friendly to all the civil and religious rights of mankind. Accordingly our revolution produced a free and efficient government; but theirs produced, in the first instance, perfect licentiousness, and in the last, absolute tyranny. Every one, therefore, who really approves of the Revolution in America, must really abhor the Revolution in France.

What has been said may, in the next place, enable us to determine, with a great degree of certainty, who are the only friends to our present Federal Constitution. All parties, indeed, profess to be friends to the CONSTITUTION, whether they approve or disapprove of the measures of those, who are immediately concerned in the administration of government. But if what has been said be just, we have a standard, by which to try the political sentiments of every man, in every political party among us. It has been observed, that the fundamental principles of the American Revolution, were neither the

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principles of mere monarchy, nor of mere aristocracy, nor of mere democracy, but those of a mixt and duly balanced government. None, therefore, can be real friends to the Constitution, who do not approve of the principles of the Revolution. And according to this criterion, neither Monarchists, nor Aristocrats, nor Democrats, nor Republicans, are friends to the Constitution; but only Federalists, who have uniformly approved and supported the principles of the Revolution, which are the principles of a mixt government. Let there be ever so many parties among us, they are all, except Federalists, sentimentally opposed to the Constitution, and would if they had power, destroy it. If there be any Monarchists among us, they would give all power to the President, which would destroy the Constitution. If there be any Aristocrats among us, they would take away all power from the President and Representatives, and give it to the Senate, which would destroy the Constitution. If there be any Republicans among us, who differ in sentiment from all other parties, they would take away all power from the President, and Senate, and Representatives, which would destroy the Constitution, and immediately introduce complete anarchy and confusion. But, if there be any Federalists among us, and I trust they are very numerous, they would have the powers, which are already delegated to the President, Senate, and Representatives, forever remain in their hands, as proper checks to each other, which

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