

İSMAİL EMRE

An Anatolian Sufi (1900-1970)

Şevket Kutkan

İsmail Emre was born in 1900, in Adana, Turkey. As he states, his father was scholar Koca Hodja (Great Hodja) Hakkı Effendi and his grandfather was Ahmet Effendi. His family was known as Great Hodjas in Adana.

He lost his father at the age of 5 and his mother at the age of 10. Being an orphan, he was brought up by his uncle's son, Şükrü Effendi the Blacksmith and he learned the art of this craft from him.

When he was 17, Emre volunteered to join the army in the last years of the World War I.

In 1921, he started working at Turkish State Railways in Adana as a coppersmith and welder. He worked there for a long period of time until he quit his job in 1943 and became self-occupied.

He married Ayşe Hanım; they had 4 daughters and a son.

Emre did not ever go to school and was illiterate, but he learned to read Arabic letters by himself and was barely able to read the Divans of Niyazi Mısri and Yunus Emre. He gradually improved his reading skill.

He learned Islamic history, teosophical issues and prophets' lives from the wise men around him and partly from books such as Ahmediyye, Muhammediyye, Shahmaran and Kan Kalesi (The Blood Castle).

Emre was only 17 when he met his murshid who taught and guided him through his spiritual journey.

İsmail Emre's murshid was Halil Develioğlu, who was born in Tarsus. We do not have enough information about his life. Yet, as we learn from Emre, Halil Effendi went through all the traditional paths and became "the Ocean of Oneness".

Even though Emre was not educated, he had "the knowledge of Nothingness", which is one of the most important issues of theosophy and spiritual life. Emre began and ceased where theosophy begins and ceases. He became the sun of Love.

He was not a poet in the sense we understand, because intellectual poets write down their poems by working on them. However, Emre recited his poems from his essence.



His poems had great value of theosophy. Emre recited his poems ceasing in God, and he did not hear the words while he was uttering them. Since he could not control the utterance of these words, Emre called his poems *Doğuş* (poetical revelations); a kind of saying by losing oneself and penetrating in God with divine inspiration. As a consequence of this, Emre was called the New Yunus Emre in Adana.

Emre said that these words continued to be uttered in his inner world, but only the necessary ones were revealed.

When someone asked Emre whether he could define the meaning of “State”, Emre said that no language could define it. He added that he was not the owner of that state, because when the partial intellect (*aql-i juzwi*) comes closer to the universal intellect (*aql-i kullî*), that State will utter in this unimagined unity.

Emre says “*doğuş* is born of our wishes and visions”. *Doğuş* is a Word of Love. Not all people can understand it. To understand it, one has to be wrapped up in that state. The theosophical conversations (*sohbet*) are the explanations of these poems. The words which are covered by divine Love come up as poems.

When this State manifested, Emre was 40 years old.

Professor Dr. Annemaria Schimmel was one of the witnesses of this State. She mentions about Emre in her book called *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*.

Doğuş helps us understand the Truth and shows us the steps of theosophical morality and inner evolution. The theosophy of these poems includes a dynamic thinking system.

Emre says: “*Tasawwuf (theosophy) is first hearing and then doing. The evolution of understanding religions leads us to tasawwuf. Religions are like the branches of a river. This river is tasawwuf and it runs into the Ocean of Oneness.*”

Emre has nearly 2400 recorded theosophical poems; his sohbetes were also published in books.*

* This excerpt is taken from Şevket Kutkan’s *Preface of Doğuşlar II* and translated by Nurgül Demirdöven.