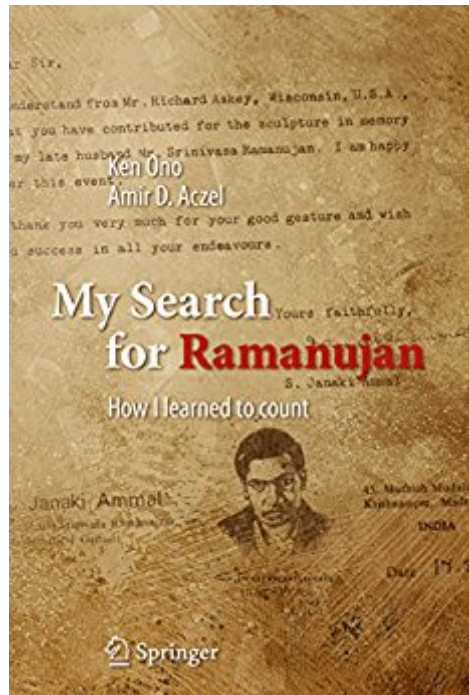


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# My Search For Ramanujan: How I Learned To Count



## Synopsis

"The son of a prominent Japanese mathematician who came to the United States after World War II, Ken Ono was raised on a diet of high expectations and little praise. Rebelling against his pressure-cooker of a life, Ken determined to drop out of high school to follow his own path. To obtain his father's approval, he invoked the biography of the famous Indian mathematical prodigy Srinivasa Ramanujan, whom his father revered, who had twice flunked out of college because of his single-minded devotion to mathematics. Ono describes his rocky path through college and graduate school, interweaving Ramanujan's story with his own and telling how at key moments, he was inspired by Ramanujan and guided by mentors who encouraged him to pursue his interest in exploring Ramanujan's mathematical legacy. Picking up where others left off, beginning with the great English mathematician G.H. Hardy, who brought Ramanujan to Cambridge in 1914, Ono has devoted his mathematical career to understanding how in his short life, Ramanujan was able to discover so many deep mathematical truths, which Ramanujan believed had been sent to him as visions from a Hindu goddess. And it was Ramanujan who was ultimately the source of reconciliation between Ono and his parents. Ono's search for Ramanujan ranges over three continents and crosses paths with mathematicians whose lives span the globe and the entire twentieth century and beyond. Along the way, Ken made many fascinating discoveries. The most important and surprising one of all was his own humanity."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In his courageous and fascinating memoir, Ken Ono elegantly traces three lives moving in odd synchronicity through time and space: his own, his father's, and famous Indian mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan. The thread that ties them together is a prodigious talent for mathematics that only begins to flourish under the mentorship of an established authority. Ramanujan's case is archetypal. His solitary mathematical development in India and his eventual collaborations with Cambridge mathematician G. H. Hardy are the stuff of myth. Ono's story is just as compelling but much more accessible because he is willing to share his painful struggles as a kid of immigrant Japanese "tiger parents", his uncertainties about his life's path, and his own eventual flourishing as a creative mathematician and teacher. It is his search for Ramanujan and the compulsion to understand the man and his mathematics that drives Ono's considerable success. And that success leads Ono to finally understand his own father and the forces that drove him to be the parent he was. This is fascinating reading: personally moving and intellectually compelling. PS: Ono is too good a storyteller to let the math slow the narrative. It is easily compartmentalized. Be not afraid.

It's hard to classify this book exactly. Mostly, it is the memoirs of Ken Ono, a mathematician at Emory University who was raised in a strict Japanese-American household and struggled to figure out what his path in life should be. Throughout his journey, he draws inspiration from the story (and the work) of the Indian mathematician Ramanujan. The book also tells Ramanujan's life story, which is fascinating enough that it has recently been turned into the movie "The Man Who Knew Infinity", which Ono served as a consultant on. Like Ramanujan, Ono's story is gripping and inspirational, and will be of interest even to people who are not generally interested in mathematics. (It's worth noting that while Ono's book discusses the culture of mathematics frequently, actual discussion of the math is mostly relegated to an appendix at the end, for better or for worse)

I have been following Ramanujan as an amateur mathematician for several decades. So when I came across Ken's book, I grabbed it. Wonderful color photos in middle. It is more of Ken's life and how he found Ramanujan. This is not a Ramanujan's biography to be clear, though there is lot of

details about the mathematical genius's life. I have hardcopies of Ramanujan's printed notebooks from TIFR, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research. It is an enigma and will require lifetime to understand. I always wonder what would have happened if Ramanujan lived till 80 years old like his wife. That would have produced a boatload of mathematical theorems. What would have happened if he lived in this Internet age? Ken's book is a great and I give to my daughter to motivate her. Fascinating read. Very well written and gripping.

It was a genuine pleasure reading Dr. Ono's story of how he became a Mathematician and the inner struggles that plagued him on that journey. A gifted child, became a gifted Man, became a prize winning Mathematician. Driven by his near worship of the Indian Genius Ramanujan, he over comes the negative voices from his classic Japanese parents. I am a Math lover, but was never good enough to get past undergraduate work in Physics. As a Doctor of Psychology ( 34 years of practice), I can say that Dr. Ono's story will be an inspiration to my young clients who are in the throes of struggling for an identity and a career. I will recommend this book to them and others often. Dr. Ono's "Tiger Parents" would be called Toxic parents by some of my colleagues, but it turned out that their method did, in fact drive this young whiz, to find his true self and express it in the call of Theoretical Mathematics. Ken Ono really is his Father's Son, and he is definitely Ramanujan's spiritual son and successor. Read this book and derive much enjoyment and at the same time, come away with a sense of understanding of the sheer beauty of the pursuit of Mathematical knowledge.

This book is one of the most interesting motivational books I have ever read. It is a must read for those who feel they did not find their path in life yet or those who feel that difficulties are prohibiting them from achieving their goals. The personal struggle of one of the world's prominent mathematicians, Ken Ono, that started at an early age (having tiger parents) could have definitely destroyed his life if it wasn't for certain events and certain decisions at certain times motivated by certain people. Few people that dealt with him at the right time in the right place helped him get where he is right now; Ramanujan (the inspiration), Basil Gordon (the self-confidence), Erika, his spouse (safety and support) in addition to other minor players. No one who is familiar with the mathematical work of Ken Ono will believe that this successful guy has passed through all of this in his life.

I found this book a fascinating read, the parallels between Ken's shaky start as a mathematician and

Ramanujan's struggle for academic acceptance are compelling and the further coincidences that end up with Ken carrying our cutting edge research on aspects of Ramanujan's legacy are intriguing. I did find one error in a quadratic form - odd numbers which can be expressed as  $x^2 + y^2 + 10z^2$  for integer values of  $x, y, z$ . The sequence should be 3, 7, 21, 31, 33, 43 etc (I suspect 23 is a typesetter's error not Ken's!). Anyway a great book. If you've seen the film, for which Ken Ono was a Maths consultant and you are interested in maths then give it a try.

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