



# The Strange Alchemy of Life and Law

By Albie Sachs

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## The Strange Alchemy of Life and Law By Albie Sachs

From a young age Albie Sachs played a prominent part in the struggle for justice in South Africa. As a result he was detained in solitary confinement, tortured by sleep deprivation and eventually blown up by a car bomb which cost him his right arm and the sight of an eye. His experiences provoked an outpouring of creative thought on the role of law as a protector of human dignity in the modern world, and a lifelong commitment to seeing a new era of justice established in South Africa.

After playing an important role in drafting South Africa's post-apartheid Constitution, he was appointed by Nelson Mandela to be a member of the country's first Constitutional Court. Over the course of his fifteen year term on the Court he has grappled with the major issues confronting modern South Africa, and the challenges posed to the fledgling democracy as it sought to overcome the injustices of the apartheid regime.

As his term on the Court approaches its end, Sachs here conveys in intimate fashion what it has been like to be a judge in these unique circumstances, how his extraordinary life has influenced his approach to the cases before him, and his views on the nature of justice and its achievement through law.

The book provides unique access to an insider's perspective on modern South Africa, and a rare glimpse into the working of a judicial mind. By juxtaposing life experiences and extracts from judgments, Sachs enables the reader to see the complex and surprising ways in which legal culture transforms subjective experience into objectively reasoned decisions. With rare candour he tells of the difficulties he has when preparing a judgment, of how every judgment is a lie. Rejecting purely formal notions of the judicial role he shows how both reason and passion (concern for protecting human dignity) are required for law to work in the service of justice.

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## **The Strange Alchemy of Life and Law By Albie Sachs Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"If I still had responsibility for the English judiciary I would encourage every judge for whom I was responsible to read this book. I am sure it would improve their understanding of what the job really involves and what justice is about." - Lord Woolf, from the preface

"The Strange Alchemy of Life and Law...is [Albie Sachs'] fascinating and honest account of how his own thinking, emotions and experiences contributed to some of the most startling, original, adventurous, far-reaching and moving decisions taken by any court in the world." - Marcel Berlins, *The Guardian*

"Mr Sachs's book is not just an appeal for sympathy for poor old judges who have to make difficult decisions but an invitation for public understanding of the abstract strengths as well as the humanity of the process." - John Forsyth, *The Scotsman*

"Sachs is a credible champion of those values not merely because his biography so faithfully embodies them, but also because of the candor and sincerity that characterize his writing-legal opinions as well as prose...makes a compelling case for the inextricable links between a biography and the bench." -Ryan Thoreson, *Boston Review*

"There is no more heroic, compassionate, or creative lawyer than Albie Sachs, and his book offers the gift of his vivid and humane first-hand account of serving as a judge, interpreting South Africa's post-apartheid Constitution, and pursuing justice on and off the bench." -Martha L. Minow, Jeremiah Smith Jr. Professor of Law and Dean of the Faculty of Law, Harvard Law School

"Sachs looks forward to a South African Constitutional Court doing justice for all...worth stealing a moment to heed Sachs's warning...poignant..." -*Newsweek*

"Sachs emerges from his narrative as an empathetic and humanistic judge deeply committed to a democratic South Africa. And besides, it is hard not to like a man who admits to doing his best thinking in the bathtub." -*Foreign Affairs*

"His arguments about the nature of judging and the role of dignity in the law will attract the attention of legal experts. Meanwhile, anyone with an interest in South Africa will appreciate Sachs' justification for explicitly

including socioeconomic rights in the South African constitution and his analysis of the logic behind the Truth and Reconciliation Commission."

--Nicolas van de Walle, Foreign Affairs

## About the Author

Albie Sachs is a Justice on the Constitutional Court of South Africa.

## Users Review

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