

CONFESSES!

**JONATHAN
AITKEN was
ruined by trying
to use the law
to conceal his
misdeeds.
Here, he urges
public figures
still hiding
behind gagging**

TO THOSE celebrities and footballers who are still hiding their misdemeanours behind injunctions and super-injunctions, I offer this warning: the game is up, and everyone except you and your lawyers knows it.

Though you may not be inclined to take advice from me, consider that I have been where you now are; I understand how difficult it must be for you to come clean and put an end to the legal lunacy of the expensive cover-up operation in which you have trapped yourselves.

So please listen to this fraternal advice from a former (and failed!) fighter on the battlefield of law courts, media exposure and concealment.

Fourteen years ago, having been a Cabinet minister, I was the central figure in an epic legal struggle to hide my own wrongdoings from the Press.

Having been exposed by a newspaper lying about who had paid my bill for a stay at the Ritz Hotel in Paris, I was foolish enough to launch a libel action against that paper in the hope that I could disprove its claims.

It may not have been a sexual impropriety, as has been the case with Ryan Giggs, who was named in the House of Commons yesterday as the foot-

cover-up can prove infinitely more damaging than the original transgression.

Richard Nixon never knew about, let alone ordered, the Watergate burglary. Yet by covering up for the aides who organised it, he was forced to resign in disgrace from the Presidency of the United States.

This must, to you, seem a ridiculous comparison — just as it seemed ludicrous to me that covering up the fact that my Ritz Hotel bill had not been paid by my wife could end in a prison sentence.

But there is an uncomfortable seed of truth here, summarised by the old saying, 'If you're in a hole, stop digging'.

I have some inkling of the pressures you must be under. Surely your families, your wives and your close friends must have no illusions about what you have done? Or have you denied your failings even to them?

Tormented

Are you making them pretend, out of misplaced loyalty, that they believe your denials? That must make them inwardly far more tormented and resentful, however hard they try to keep up appearances when they are around you.

How should you handle the next few days (or longer)? I have two suggestions, both difficult, but far preferable to the torture through which you

baller who has been cowering behind a super-injunction. But I was determined to stop the truth coming out all the same.

Having lied about what I'd done, I, too, wanted to use the full force of the law to cover it up.

Hubris

While super-injunctions did not exist in the 1990s, gagging libel writs did, which could be used to silence newspapers even if they wanted to print the truth.

I could afford them — so I used them.

Famously, I said that I would take up the 'simple sword of truth and trusty shield of fair play' against my accusers. But instead of giving me a quiet life and protecting my public reputation, my hubris sucked me into a quagmire of personal misjudgments, family traumas and legal nightmares.

Does this sound familiar to any of you?

If so, please pause to remember that even though your super-injunctions have blown up into a national melodrama you never imagined possible, you're the ones that started it. And you alone can stop it.

This is the time for all of you to call a halt to this ongoing farce before it causes you and your families any more pain and pressure.

In defiance of the court orders you secured with those expensive lawyers of yours, almost all of you have already been named on the internet on one website or another — and you must know it's only a matter of time before your names emerge.

Last month, TV presenter Andrew Marr took the bold decision to out himself in the Daily Mail as having had a

orders to end this legal farce and come clean

super-injunction in place for several years. He had taken it out in 2008 to disguise the fact that he had a love child with another woman during his marriage (though the child later proved not to be his).

Last week, Sir Fred Goodwin was exposed as having had an affair with a colleague even as the Royal Bank of Scotland was failing — but only after a peer stood up and named him in the House of Lords. Until that point, Sir Fred had done his utmost to keep the relationship secret.

Now, Ryan Giggs has been revealed as the man who ordered his lawyers to pursue the Twitter website in reference to the super-injunction he had taken out.

In short, the dam has burst — which is why I urge the rest of you to go public with your own indiscretions before you are forced into the open like Giggs and Goodwin.

No doubt you will think me insane to suggest such a thing. But believe me, having been through this situation, I speak from bitter experience.

How I wish some candid friend or close relative had persuaded me, in May 1997, to take this same advice. If I had

done, I would certainly have avoided my own downward spiral into disgrace, divorce, bankruptcy and, finally, jail for perjury.

You may not, unlike me, face jail, but the path you have chosen could lead to disgrace far greater than any that would have arisen had you only faced the truth to begin with.

The methods you are now using to maintain what you regard as your privacy have become utterly unreasonable — and spectacularly counter-productive.

Indignation

Seen from the inside of a media storm, I know that it is easy to work yourself up into a mood of self-righteous indignation over what you see as the excessive intrusiveness of tabloid journalism.

But a Sunday tabloid exposé is just another weekend story. Bad headlines today are fish and chip paper tomorrow.

If you had not taken out your super-injunction and had allowed the stories to be published, the embarrassment would long since have subsided. It is a well-established law of the media jungle that a

and your immediate circle must now be passing.

First, I suggest you have a 'no-holds-barred' meeting with your closest friends and family members. Level completely with them. Open your heart to them.

Tell them your secrets. Let them share in your worst fears. You may be surprised at what strength and support you gain from such a process.

When I did exactly that, I discovered that my inner circle preferred a son, father or best friend who was vulnerable, to the man who had pretended to them that he was powerful.

Your sins, like mine, may have been scarlet, but when they are no longer suppressed from your nearest and dearest, it feels as though a boil has been lanced.

Second, I suggest you face yourselves. You need to admit that you have got it wrong, and that your legal tactics are doomed to failure — as were those of Fred Goodwin and Ryan Giggs.

As I see it, your super-injunctions are just about the most spectacular own goal since I delivered my Sword of Truth speech. But at least you can make a dignified apology to your fans and your families without extending the agony.

The sooner you get out of the law courts and back on the television screen, or the football pitch, or wherever it is you excel, the happier and more peaceful you will be.

As I know, peace and happiness can be restored to life even after the worst of high-profile media and legal firestorms.

But you have to stop those storms now, and only you can give the order. Good luck!