

# THE POWER WITHIN YOU



*A Guide for Entering the Age of Bar Mitzvah*

*Presented by:*

**GU**  **RD**  
**YOUR EYES**

Written and edited by  
Rabbi Lior Lavi and Rabbi Yechezkel Stelzer

*Translated by Rabbi Eli Ozarowski*

**GU**  **RD**  
**YOUR EYES**

הרב אהרן פלדמן  
RABBI AHARON FELDMAN  
421 YESHIVA LANE, APT 3A, BALTIMORE, MD 21208  
TEL.: 410-6539433 FAX: 410-6534694  
STUDY: 410-4847200 EXT. 6050; DIRECT LINE: 443-5486050  
E-MAIL: RAF@NIRC.EDU

ROSH HAYESHIVA  
NER ISRAEL RABBINICAL COLLEGE

ראש הישיבה  
ישיבת נר ישראל

בס"ד כה בשבט תשע"ז

לכל מאן דבעי :

ראיתי את החוברת "הכח שבך" (The Power In You) המיועדת לנערים לפני התבגרותם ובה הדרכה איך יתמודדו עם השינויים בגוף ובנפש הממשמשים ובאים עליהם, ויש בחוברת תועלת עצומה שהיא מכניסה לנער עצות נכונות ע"פ דרך התורה עוד לפני שהיצה"ר מקונן בקרבו.

וראיתי שוהחוברת נכתבה בצורה עדינה ומחנכת ובשפה המדברת על לב הנער. וראוי לחלקה ביעקב ולהפיצה בישראל כדי שיוכל כל נער להתכונן בעוד מועד להזהר מסערות התאוה שעלולות לשטוף אותו. ועצה טובה נראה לי אם הדבר אפשרי, שחוץ ממה שהנער יקרא את החוברת שגם כל אב ימסור את תוכנה לבנו בע"פ כדי לתת לעניינה יתר תוקף.

בברכה,

  
אהרן פלדמן

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Dear friend,

Every new stage of life brings with it the potential for growth and fresh energy, as well as new questions and challenges. Whether you have celebrated your Bar Mitzva yet or not; whether you have just begun attending a new school or not, you are currently in the midst of an important change. You have just concluded your childhood years and are now beginning a new stage of life, that of adulthood.

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Let's start with a bit of background as to why this pamphlet is important. There are a number of important ideas that are worthwhile to become familiar during this time. Most parents would prefer to share the information discussed here with their children themselves. However, it's not always easy for parents to find the right time and method to do so. This pamphlet was written following many conversations with young men as well as adults who related how they were never presented with much of the information here when they were your age. Many of them said that had they known these things at the time, it would have saved them a lot of unnecessary pain and hardship.

This pamphlet is designed to help make you aware of some of these issues. If after reading it, you still have questions, don't keep them to yourself, even if it makes you uncomfortable to talk about them. Your parents, teachers, and rabbis would be happy to talk to you about them, and will be very impressed if you do so in a mature manner.

# 1. Growing and thriving with joy

Let's start at the beginning. Growing up involves a lot of changes, some of which have to do with your body, and some that are related to your personality and your inner self. When it comes to your body, you may have noticed that you can probably run a lot faster now than you could when you were little. This, of course, is because your muscles have grown stronger and developed more. You may also be getting taller and developing an adult body, which is evident from the hair that may be beginning to grow in various places on your body, such as your legs, hands, and face. Your voice may also be beginning to change and becoming lower and more like that of a man. These changes are all part of the overall process of maturation and growing up. They're normal and natural, and mean that you are on the right track, and your body is developing properly.

Aside from these physical changes, you may also be experiencing quite a few mental and emotional changes. Sometimes you might just want to be alone. You might occasionally want others to stop talking to you and stop asking annoying questions. You may also get somewhat frustrated when people don't understand you and are not sensitive enough to your inner feelings.

Your friends are probably a very important part of your life now, and it's important for you to know what they say about all sorts of things that you think and do. You may sometimes find yourself checking whether what you are doing is the same as what they're doing; you may sometimes be unsure whether you should follow the crowd or do your own thing, even if acting independently is not so easy.

Your mental capabilities are also developing at this stage. You are able to better understand ideas that you encounter, and you may have started thinking more deeply about things that you read and study. These abilities also allow you to understand better those around you, to consider their needs, and to help them more, rather than just focusing on yourself. These mental capacities will allow you to slowly develop your own values, which will motivate you to take part in, or decide not to take part in, certain activities.

Your more advanced mental capabilities also allow you to develop more self-control, and enable you to reject all sorts of surrounding unhealthy temptations.

All of these changes are part of the process of growth, development, and maturation. An awareness and understanding of the importance of these changes should bring with it a feeling of excitement, as you prepare to usher in this new stage of life.

## 2. Why it's important to know

It's possible that you have already heard something about the following subject from others, but it may have been incomplete, or you may not have totally understood it; that's why it's important to discuss it. The changes that occur at this stage of life are related to a subject about which it is sometimes difficult to speak—where do babies come from?

This subject and some of the explanations offered here might be a bit confusing, but it's very important to know about, for a number of reasons:

A. *Understanding the changes you are undergoing* - Your body is changing, and so is your mind. If you want to feel calmer and more

confident about what's happening, it's worthwhile to understand how your body functions, what exactly is changing, and why.

*B. Learning the information accurately* - There are many ways to learn something. You can learn information in the most direct fashion, or you may hear about it in a roundabout manner from indirect sources. When learned this way, you may receive information that is wrong, or only part of the story. This pamphlet is designed to help you understand this subject in a straightforward, accurate, and productive manner.

*C. Knowing how to be careful* - Just like in any other area of life, there are some things that you have to watch out for. If you don't learn about it, you won't know why you need to be careful, or what you should watch out for. Learning about it should help to clarify these points as well.

*D. Knowing the Halacha* - In this area, just like many other realms of life, the Torah guides us as to how to live properly. In order to know what Hashem, who gave us the Torah, wants from us, and how best to make use of the world He created for us, we need to learn what the Torah and the halacha have to say about this subject.

These issues need to be discussed at appropriate times only, and not whenever and with whomever we feel like. So it's probably not a good idea to talk about them with your younger brothers or with others when they happen to be around. When they get to the appropriate stage of life, you can talk about it with them as well.



### 3. Your new potential

In order to fully understand how babies are born and where they come from, we need to understand the different functions of your body.

The body consists of many different parts, each of which has been given its own role to play by Hashem. Our hands allow us to touch, hold things, eat, write, and so much more; we stand with, walk with, run with, and jump with our feet; our eyes enable us to see; and our mouth allows us to eat and speak.

In addition to helping direct your physical life, your body is also a spectacular home for your *neshama*, your soul. Even the biggest scientists in the world consider the soul to be something mysterious and amazing. The more we learn about it, the more it's clear how little we understand about the miraculous ways it functions.

One of the most important roles of your body is its ability to help you become a parent to children. This is the role that is developed the most during the period of passage from childhood to adulthood. At this time, your body is beginning to develop the capability of procreation, or having children.

This role of procreation is connected to the first mitzva in the Torah, where Adam and Chava were commanded to have children right after they were created: "You shall be fruitful and multiply," (*Bereshit* 1:27) in other words, to have kids. This is such an important mitzva that when we fulfill it, we are considered partners with Hashem in bringing additional life and blessing to the world. Just like Hashem created the world with His kindness and continues to maintain it, so too we humans can partner with Him in bringing additional life into the world with love and joy.

This inner potential of having children has been “asleep” until now, but this is when it begins to “wake up.” That occurs due to a command given by the brain to create hormones, substances secreted by the brain that are responsible for the proper development of the various parts of the body, and assist every person in carrying out their jobs.

Some hormones are responsible for helping the muscles grow, others are in charge of making your hair grow, some help you to become taller, and some are in charge of preparing your body so that you can bring new life into the world.

The hormones that help the body prepare for the task of having children instruct the body to create tiny particles called sperm. These sperm help you to father children, after you get married, G-d willing.

This ability to give birth is amazingly powerful. Part of its power comes from the great significance it has: It increases the amount of life in the world and ensures that life continues in this world after us. If we compare this role to the others mentioned above, we can see that the ability to have children is greater in a certain sense: Eating, walking, and touching, for example, all enable us to maintain our lives in the present. In contrast, the ability to have children is related to the future, not just to the here and now. The human species is dependent upon this uniqueness of looking toward the future in order to make sure that we continue to exist.

It is not coincidental that this process takes place at the same time as you become bar mitzva. Since this is the age that you become an adult and begin to take responsibility for your actions, it is certainly fitting that Hashem develops your physical capability of bringing life into the world as well: As the ability to give life to others is developing inside of you, you now have the opportunity as an adult

member of the Jewish people to dedicate time and energy to studying Torah, performing *mitzvot*, and helping others. Your effort in working toward these goals in a serious and sincere manner also adds additional depth to life in the world—it adds content, significance, and values, and ultimately gives you a life of connection to Hashem.

In other words, the potential developing within you is not only related to actually having a child, but also to the ability to create and impact upon the world. You can influence the world by doing *mitzvot*, speaking encouraging words, and by acting on creative ideas that can benefit the world. You are capable of great things, and have tremendous potential that will begin to be actualized at this time.

## 4. So how does it work?

Like all males, you have a male reproductive organ, which is sometimes called the *eiver ha-bris* in Hebrew, the limb of the bris (covenant). This limb has two parts that you should become acquainted with: The limb itself, which we use for going to the bathroom, and the part underneath it, the testicles.

The two testicles are round and shaped like small balls, and are located within a portion of skin of the body called the scrotum sack. The testicles are very sensitive, so care is needed to ensure that they don't get injured, which can hurt tremendously.

At this stage, when the ability to have children begins to develop in the body, hair begins to grow around the reproductive organ. Although you might initially find this alarming, don't worry—it means your body is working properly and is preparing itself for the time that it can fulfill this important function. Even if you have not yet reached

this stage, that's ok too; everyone has a different rate of development.

## 5. A Factory inside your body

The testicles are like a mini-factory inside your body. Around the age of 13, this factory begins to produce many tiny little particles called sperm. Each sperm can, with Hashem's help, cause the creation of a baby, when it encounters the particle found in the female body called the egg. It's amazing that such a small particle can be transformed over time into a developed and complex person, and that you, too, were created this way.

These sperm are released from the body when the reproductive organ becomes hard and erect, from the same place that you go to the bathroom. They emerge within a whitish liquid substance called semen, which creates the environment in which sperm can survive outside of the body.

When we are awake, this semen does not simply leave the body by itself, but it can occasionally be discharged while we are sleeping. This phenomenon is called a seminal discharge or nocturnal emission in scientific language, and *keri* in the language of the Sages, related to the word *mikreh*, something accidental and not intentional. If this happens, you will feel that your clothes or sheets have gotten a little wet. Although this doesn't happen to everyone, if it does, it is totally natural, and there is no need to be frightened or upset. On the contrary, this is a sign that your body systems are working the way they should.

## 6. Bris Mila

Since the *eiver ha-bris* has such an important role to play in our lives, the Torah has given us an important mitzva to perform relating to it, and that of course is the mitzva of bris *mila*. During a bris, we remove the part of the skin known as the *orla*, or foreskin, which covers the upper part of the limb. By doing this mitzva, we help the baby to enter into the bris, which actually means covenant or agreement, that Hashem made with Avraham Avinu, that we are committed to being Jewish and establishing a special relationship with Hashem. Through this ceremony of the bris *mila*, a baby receives this physical mark that identifies him as part of the Jewish people.

Have you ever thought about the significance of this mitzva? After all, it's a little strange to take an eight-day old baby and do something to him that appears painful, and even a little cruel. What is especially surprising is that the vast majority of Jews, even those who don't consider themselves to be religious, have continued to fulfill this mitzva very carefully. So what's the secret of the bris *mila*?

## 7. To be a Jew

It is a great privilege to be a Jew and act like one, even though sometimes it takes a little bit of courage to do so. This trait of mental courage, known as *gevura*, accompanies a Jew throughout all parts of life. Getting up each morning to *daven*, checking whether one is eating only kosher food, waiting in between eating meat and dairy, watching what one says, not stealing or lying, and keeping Shabbat all require us to overcome urges or desires to which we sometimes may want to give in.

One of the primary goals of the *mitzvot* is to teach us how to overcome our personal desires, in order to live according to the will

of Hashem. The word *mitzvot* in Hebrew is related to the word *tzevet*, staff or team of people, and hints to the idea of connection or unity (which should be true of a staff of workers also). Each mitzva links us to the will of Hashem. When the goal of trying to fulfill Hashem's will is at the center of our lives, then our entire day looks different, and all of life looks different. It takes on much deeper significance, and we can achieve a sense of inner calm and happiness.

This is why the first mitzva in the Torah that Avraham is commanded is the mitzva of bris *mila*, in order to teach him, and us, that to be Jewish, you need courage and inner mental strength. Although the actual cutting of the *orla* is painful, what one receives by doing so is well worth it.

Even if we accept this explanation, we may still wonder why the mitzva must be done in this way. Why must it involve removing a portion of our skin, and why did this sign have to be imprinted on our bodies in this way? The great Torah sages have offered many explanations for this over the generations. Here are some of them:

A. *Less is More*- Through the mitzva of bris *mila*, we rectify ourselves by removing an unnecessary portion of our body, the foreskin. This action teaches us that our connection to Hashem is strengthened by removing unhealthy character traits, such as selfishness, jealousy, desire.

B. *Demonstrates the Difference between Jews and Non-Jews*- bris *mila* separates us from the rest of the nations. Just like soldiers in the army wear special uniforms that differentiate them from other ordinary citizens, so too, we, the Jewish people, have special uniforms. We have uniforms we wear, like *tzitzit*, and we have a permanent sign on our bodies that reminds us constantly that we are part of the chosen nation that has received a unique task in this

world. As we say in *Birkat hamazon*, “we thank you Hashem... for the bris that you have imprinted on our flesh.”

C. *Remember the goal*- Our bris *mila* reminds us constantly that the ability to have children is connected to our responsibility as Jews in this world. It reminds us that the goal of having children, for a Jew, is to further the presence of Hashem in the world and remain committed to Him. This constant sign reminds us of this goal and its connection to the tremendous potential of having children.

## 8. Shemirat Ha-bris

The commitment to this agreement, or bris, is not just something that took place a long time ago when we were born. To maintain this bris with Hashem, we are commanded to continue to watch over it all the time, especially when the potential for having children begins to develop--- now, at the age of adulthood.

None of us were active participants in the mitzva of bris *mila* performed on the eighth day of life. However, the concept of *shemirat ha-bris*, which will be explained shortly, is a manner of voluntarily choosing to maintain this bris that was given to us at birth.

*Shemirat ha-bris* is the preserving of the capability to have children until the time that we can actually do so, after we get married. Every sperm in our body contains the potential for creating life, which makes each one very precious. In order to avoid harming this capability by using it before the right time, one should not touch the *ever ha-bris* for no reason, because this can cause semen, together with sperm, to be released. That process is called *zera levatala*, wasting sperm, and the halacha tells us that we should refrain from doing so.

Even if one does avoid touching, sometimes the reproductive organ may still begin to harden, called erection, and one may feel a little bit of pressure or tension in the body. This means that the body is preparing to discharge sperm, a result we would like to avoid. It is important to realize that this is just a temporary sensation that passes with time. It's sort of like a wave in the ocean: The wave comes, and in order to avoid drowning, you just put your head down, until it passes over you. Here too, a little patience and mental strength is necessary, and it will pass by itself.

Whenever this "wave" comes, the best thing to do is to distract yourself by doing something else, like reading a good book, going out for a walk, concentrating on your studies, talking to a friend, or any other activity that helps to the "wave" pass over easily. Of course, if something hurts or doesn't feel right and doesn't go away after a period of time, talk to a parent or doctor about it to see if everything is ok.

Certain kinds of thoughts, perhaps due to something you have seen, may cause your limb to become erect. This is also natural, so don't get frightened. Just distract yourself, and don't touch, as we mentioned earlier.

If for some reason semen does come out, it is very important not to get upset and take it too hard. Although perhaps you regret that this happened, the concept of *teshuvah*, repentance, is a great gift that Hashem has given us, so that we can improve ourselves and move forward even if we have made mistakes. Hashem gave us this gift because He knows us best, and knows what types of difficult challenges our bodies give us. Hashem loves us, and He certainly wants you to be happy, full of hope and love, and maintain your belief in your amazing potential.



As mentioned earlier, another instance where semen may be released is the natural phenomenon called a nocturnal emission, which takes place while sleeping, without doing anything. If this happens, don't feel disappointed or upset, as this too is natural.

## 9. The advantage of waiting

We have learned that *shemirat ha-bris* preserves our ability to have children. This is done by waiting patiently to use our sperm for the time that we can properly use it, when we get married. In previous times, the average age for marriage was earlier than it is now, and it was often shortly after the age of maturity. Today, though, our way of life has changed, and we often have to do all sorts of things before we get married: Learn Torah, go to high school and college, become more mentally and emotionally prepared for life, and develop the ability to take responsibility for a family, which includes working on skills such as our patience and listening to others.

This change in lifestyle obviously delays the time that we are capable of using our ability to have children. However, there is also a big advantage to having this time in our lives. First, preserving the ability to have children properly can build a person's inner strength. The word *gever*, which means man in Hebrew, is connected to the word *gevura*, inner mental strength. To truly be a *gibor*, a hero, you must sometimes overcome all sorts of temptations. In other words, some things we should choose not to do, and we indeed have the ability to withstand the challenges that accompany this choice.

Although it's not easy, making the right choice at a time of struggle or difficulty elevates a person and strengthens their inner willpower and commitment.

When we overcome a challenge, we feel an amazing sensation, sort of like what one would feel when trying to climb to the top of a tall, steep mountain and finally arriving. When you stand on the top of the mountain, look at how far you have come, and breathe the clear mountain air, your heart fills with excitement and joy at successfully accomplishing your goal. This is how we hope to feel if we can successfully curb our thoughts and desires about marriage until the right time.

Does everyone who reaches this age encounter any or all of the difficulties and challenges described here right away? Not necessarily. Some experience these issues sooner, some later, and some don't at all. What's important here is to understand the right way to approach these struggles, if and when they do come. Throughout life, many opportunities to scale new mountain peaks present themselves daily. Every day brings its own challenges and opportunities. Having the strength and courage to make the right choice every day anew, and continue to move forward even after a fall, are the keys to success for anything in life, and the same goes for our issue as well.

## 10. Guarding our eyes

Our eyes play an important role in the body, as they are the gateway to the heart and to the soul. Everything we see causes us to think. If, for example, you saw a beautiful view on a trip somewhere, you will likely remember it and even be able to conjure it in your mind days or weeks after you return home.

The Torah tells us: "And do not stray after your heart and after your eyes," a verse we recite twice a day in the Shema. What does it mean to stray after one's eyes? Our Sages have explained that this refers to

not gazing at women who are not dressed modestly or at immodest scenes or images.

Immodest images tempt the heart and the brain in an improper and unhealthy way. Since your memory works so well at allowing you to recall events at a later time, Hashem commands us to guard our eyes from images that can have a negative influence on the heart and our thoughts.

Even if we feel a pull toward a certain image, or are simply curious about it, the Torah instructs us to guard our eyes, to overcome the challenge, and not gaze. Just like there is a mitzva not to speak *lashon hara*, evil about someone else, even if it is really tempting, or not to eat non-kosher food, even if we are starving and there is a delicious cheeseburger in front of us, we must withstand the temptation. It is precisely for situations like these that Hashem gave us the power of free choice, and we can choose to overcome the feelings and thoughts that encourage us to look.

Sometimes this is quite difficult and requires a tremendous amount of effort, such as when you are just walking down the street and happen to see something that catches your attention, and feel an urge to look at it more intently.

Perhaps for this reason, Hashem, who created us and knows how hard it is to guard our eyes, created our eyes in a manner that allows them to close easily. Although it is very easy to just follow our eyes, it is equally easy to simply close them and not look. The concepts of guarding our eyes and *shemirat ha-bris*, guarding the bris, are actually connected to each other. If we keep our eyes protected and do not gaze at immodest people or images, it is easier to maintain the bris also.

## Internet

The internet has made many things easier in life, but it also has brought many negative consequences of which one must be aware. Some people use the internet for negative and harmful purposes, and others spread immodest or violent pictures and movies. These types of materials are not appropriate for anyone, and certainly not for a Jew wanting to be a good and sincere person, fulfill the will of Hashem, and protect his eyes, heart, and *neshama*.

If you don't have internet, this task is much easier. But if you do, and you don't yet have a filtering system, it is critical to ask your parents to install one on your computer and any other device at home that can filter out inappropriate sites.

Why do we need a filter? Didn't we say above that we believe we can overcome our desires and just not look?

First of all, sometimes we just get to these inappropriate sites without wanting to or trying, just like someone who walks down the street and then falls into a hole that he didn't see. So just like all of the holes on the street should be covered or fixed, so too we try to cover over all of the "holes" that exist on the internet, so that we don't accidentally get sucked in. In addition, a filter helps us to reject all of the corrupt and inappropriate material on the internet, just like we throw out the garbage from our house. Even if we know we would never actually eat garbage, who wants to have smelly garbage in the house?

Even if you don't have internet at home, or you have a filter, that doesn't mean you are entirely protected. In today's world, the chances of coming across inappropriate material on the internet are very great unless we are extremely careful. It can happen when a friend shows you something immodest on a smartphone, or when

you are on a public computer and accidentally get to something you shouldn't. It doesn't matter how it happens, the important thing is to know how to stop it in time, and to make sure that it doesn't happen again.

## Stopping in time

If you feel you are having problems with any of these issues, such as guarding your eyes, *shemirat ha-bris*, or viewing inappropriate material on the internet, you should know that it's not too late, and help is available. It is best to speak with someone you know and trust, such as your father, mother, rabbi, or teacher, who can help you determine the best course of action.

It's very important to stop getting too used to any of these things before seeing them becomes totally natural and second nature. Even if you're a bit embarrassed, talking about it with someone is the best thing to do, rather than keeping it to yourself. If you can stop in time, you can return to being your old natural self just as you were before getting involved with it. It's also helpful to remember that you're not alone. Many other boys struggle with these challenges as well, and many have in fact succeeded in extracting themselves with help from the right person at the right time.

## 11. Protecting your body

There are other problematic activities related to your body that are less common, but equally important to stay away from.

Sometimes, a person may want to engage in an activity connected to your body or their body for some reason. For instance, they may ask you to show them certain private parts of your body, or to let them touch you there. Sometimes they may ask you to touch them in those

same parts of the body as well. It may be someone you know, or someone you don't know.

It doesn't matter why they are asking; these actions are not allowed and could be very dangerous for your well-being. It doesn't matter if the person asking is a boy your age, an adult, a stranger, a relative, a rabbi or teacher—no one should be doing these things to you, and you should know how and when to protect yourself from those who may want to harm you.

Even if such a person offers you money or anything else, or threatens you that if you tell anyone, he will hurt you or someone in your family, it doesn't matter: Do not let him do it.

This is especially important to remember if you live, or will be living, in a dormitory: Don't touch anyone else's private areas, and don't let them touch you in an inappropriate or uncomfortable manner. If this happens to you, do not be ashamed to tell someone that you trust, and don't wait to do so—it's critical to stop it as soon as possible.

If someone tries to harm you in this manner, remember the following three rules:

- A. *Say no*- Say it loud and clear, so that the person has no doubt that you do not agree with what he is doing.
- B. *Escape*- Get away as fast as you can from anyone who approaches you in this manner, as he may wish to harm you.
- C. *Tell Someone*- Find someone you trust and tell them exactly what happened.

You have the ability to prevent damage from occurring, and through your courage and effort, you can save yourself and also prevent harm from befalling others.

If, G-d forbid, someone has harmed you in this manner, do not think for a moment that it is your fault, or that it has anything to do with your actions. The guilty person is the one who did it to you!

In addition, even something like this has already happened to you, do not keep it to yourself. Turn to your parents, or any other adult figure that you trust, and tell them what happened. They can help you and determine how to deal with the individual who harmed you. If you have already turned to someone for help, but feel that the matter has not been properly addressed, you can use the contact information at the end of this pamphlet to receive assistance.

## 12. One more thing

We hope that this pamphlet will help you understand and appreciate the tremendous importance of this unique stage of life that you are currently experiencing. Now that you are familiar with your potential, responsibilities, and the things to watch out for, we hope that you feel more prepared for the challenges facing you.

If you have any questions, problems, or something you feel the need to discuss, don't hesitate--- talk to your parents, rabbi, teacher, or other mentors, and they will be happy to listen and assist you.

We believe in you and in your amazing talents.

Hatzlacha!

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**For consultations, assistance, or other materials,  
email [gye.help@gmail.com](mailto:gye.help@gmail.com).**

**GU**  **RD**  
**YOUR EYES**