Annette from Shoeburyness, UK asked:

Dear Rabbi,
What bracha should I recite before eating Pringles Potato Chips?

Dear Annette,
I've got a better question. How in the world do they get them all to stack up like that inside that can? :-) To answer your question, I phoned Pringles to find out how they are made: First the potatoes are cooked, mashed and dehydrated into potato flour. Then “just enough” water is added to form a dough which is flattened, cut, molded into a saddle-shape, quick fried and canned (which answers my question about how they get them into that can).

The bracha on potato flour is Shehakol. Since Pringles are made from potato flour, perhaps they are considered potato flour “masquerading” as potato chips and therefore Shehakol. On the other hand, since they look like potatoes, perhaps they are considered “resuscitated potatoes” and therefore Borei P’ri HaAdam.

I asked Jerusalem’s Rabbi Meir Bransdorfer, shli’ta, and he ruled that the bracha for Pringles is Shehakol.

Ron Shama wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
What is the source for ‘Mayim Achronim’? Some people say that it’s halacha, but I’ve been to people where they don’t do it. And are women supposed to? Thanks

Dear Ron,
The Shulchan Aruch states that “Mayim Achronim Chova,” i.e., washing one’s hands before Bircat Hamazon is an obligation. Rabbi Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, shli’ta, told me that women are included in this obligation to the same degree as men.

There are two reasons which are offered:
• “Just as a soiled Kohen is invalid to perform the Temple Service in the Beit Hamikdash, so too soiled hands make a person unfit to say a blessing;”
• To clean off any “Melach Sdomit” — “salt of Sodom” — which might be on the hands. Melach Sdomit was a strong salt harmful to the eyes.

Some people have the custom to not wash Mayim Achronim. Since Melach Sdomit is virtually non-existent today, and the concept of “cleanliness,” is a relative matter and most people don’t consider their hands “dirty” after a meal, therefore washing them would not be necessary.

I once heard a beautiful explanation of the symbolism of Mayim Achronim: Mayim Achronim washes off the “Salt of Sodom.” The people of Sodom were infamous for their stingy cold-heartedness, especially regarding hospitality towards strangers. For example, the people of Sodom surrounded Lot’s house and ordered him to send out the wayfarers he was hosting. After a meal, having eaten our fill, we might not empathize with a poor stranger knocking on our door asking for a little food. This quality of cold-heartedness is the antithesis of Judaism, and therefore we “wash it off” — saying, “We want no part of it!”

Sources:
• Chulin 105a,b & Tosafot, Berachot 53b and Tosafot.
• Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 181:1, 10; M. B. 22.

A Riddle:
Yossi Klein from Har Nof, Israel posed this riddle:

Which 3 people mentioned in the Torah said “Baruch Hashem?”