The holiday of Shavuot has many names. Let’s review four of them:

1. **Chag HaShavuot**
   - *Chag HaShavuot* is the most frequent name in Tanach (for example in Shemot 34:22 and Devarim 16:10). *Shavua* means “week,” so this name means “Festival of Weeks.” The word *shavua* derives from *sheva*, the number seven, because there are seven days in a week. Since the holiday of Shavuot is at the end of a seven-week cycle, the name also alludes to the 7 x 7 nature of the festival.
   - The root means “to swear, to take an oath.” In the story about the origin of the name Beer Sheva, both “seven” and “oaths” appear:
     - “Avimelech said to Avraham, ‘What mean these seven ewes which you have set apart?’ He replied, ‘You are to accept these seven ewes from me as proof that I dug this well!’ Hence that place was called Beer-sheba, for there the two of them swore an oath” (Bereishit 21:29-31).
   - As a result, some have connected the two roots. Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffman (Bereishit 21:30) writes that seven is considered a Divine number, because of the seven days of Creation. As a result, people would hold seven items when taking an oath. The linguist Ernest Klein writes that שבע as “oath” came from the sense of “binding oneself by seven things, or by seven oaths.”

2. **Chag HaKatzir**
   - The name *Chag HaKatzir*, the “Harvest (or Reaping) Festival,” appears in Shemot 23:16. This name indicates that the day is meant to thank G-d for the successful wheat harvest. The name derives from the root קציר – “to cut short.”
   - The related word *katzar* means “short.”
   - The linguist Edward Horowitz gives these examples:
     - קציר - cut; from it we have קציר, end.
     - קצין - cut; from it we have קצין, captain, judge. The word cut is figuratively used for deciding.
     - חצץ - scrape off; מלקחת - set apart – forbidden for handling on Shabbat.
   - קצוב - butcher; מלקצוב - a profession – is what one is cut out for
   - Based on this, some scholars believe that there was a two-letter root system in Hebrew before the three-letter one in use today.

3. **Yom HaBikkurim**
   - In Bamidbar 28:26, the holiday is referred to as *Yom HaBikkurim* – “the day of the first fruits.” This name commemorates the *bikkurim* offering, also called [*Bechorot*](https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bechorot) (the two breads). It was the offering brought from the first wheat of that season. The Torah commands, “You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the first fruits of the wheat harvest” (Shemot 34:22). While in popular imagery, offerings were made of all the fruits of the Land of Israel, on Shavuot only wheat was brought, because the other fruits ripen later. Those other fruits were brought until, and on, Sukkot.
   - *Bikkurim* derives from the root בִּֽקַּר – “to bring forth.” From that root, we get the word *bechor* – “first born.” While both *bechorim* and *bechorot* are found as plurals for *bechor*, some scholars say that *bechorim* applies to people, whereas *bechorot* applies to animals.
   - Some scholars connect the root בִּֽקַּר to other roots that express similar ideas. For example, Klein connects it to בִּֽקַּר, meaning “to grow up, mature,” which gives us the word מִקְצָר – “adult.” Several others also connect מִקְצָר to בִּֽקַּר, by saying that both mean “to break forth, be early.” This is the root of *boker* – “morning,” the time the daylight breaks through.

4. **Zman Matan Torateinu**
   - Until now, we’ve looked at names that appear in Tanach. In the Talmud, Shavuot is referred to as *Atzeret*. (I discussed the background to that word in HaMizrachi, Volume 2, Issue 5, October 2019). A name that doesn’t appear in Talmudic literature, but is used in our prayers, is *Zman Matan Torateinu* – “the time our Torah was given.”
   - A question is often asked – why do we call it the day the Torah was given, and not the day the Torah was received – *Yom Kabbalat HaTorah*? The most popular answer is that the Torah was given only once, but we “receive” it every day. However, looking at Talmudic literature, we see that the phrase *Matan Torah* is quite common – appearing dozens of times. On the other hand, *Kabbalat HaTorah* only appears in a few midrashim. So it seems likely to me that when the prayers were standardized, they chose the more common phrase.

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