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Boris Johnson tells of Churchill's drinking, admiration for Jews

Danna Harman

“One of the most amazing things about Winston Churchill was his ability to drink — I mean to drink enough alcohol to fell an ox.” With those words, visiting London Mayor Boris Johnson began his inaugural Winston Churchill lecture in Jerusalem yesterday evening.

Johnson, author of “The Churchill Factor: How One Man Made History,” went on to tell the packed audience at Mishkenot Sha’ananim that while Britain’s greatest wartime leader “started the day with a weak whisky and water — which he used as a kind of mouthwash,” he rejected any suggestion that the “famous triangular kink in the border between Jordan and Saudi Arabia — known as Winston’s hiccup — was the result of a... slip of the ruler when he was Colonial Secretary.”

In between cracking up the audience with such vignettes, the popular London mayor, who is on a three-day economic-oriented trip to Israel, also shared some more serious thoughts about Churchill and his relationship to this country.



Johnson speaking last night.

Michal Fattal / Mishkenot Sha'ananim

“What is certainly not a myth is that Churchill drew that map... and that he was one of the fathers of the modern Middle East,” said Johnson. “He even coined the term Middle East, or helped to popularize it.”

Johnson told of how Churchill came to Israel in 1922 as Colonial Secretary, giving a hearing to both the Jewish community and the Palestinian Arabs. “It was his job to give effect to that masterpiece of Foreign Office Janus facing doublespeak and equivocation, the Balfour declaration,” Johnson quipped.

“If Balfour had been re-

sponsible for His Majesty’s government’s policy on cake, he would have been pro-having it and pro-eating it,” added the mayor to applause.

Johnson also spoke of Churchill’s “deepest personal sympathies,” towards the Jewish people, probably, said Johnson, “because of qualities that he evidently shared himself: energy, self-reliance, hard work, family life.”

“If we look at the history of modern Israel there is no doubt that the comparison can be extended — and that there is something Churchillian about the country he helped to create.”