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LONDON MAYOR Boris Johnson (center) with Israel, Britain and the Commonwealth Association chairman Alex Deutsch (right) and Hilton Israel public relations director Motti Verses. (Richard Halon)

#### GRAPEVINE

• By GREER FAY CASHMAN

■ QUITE A lot of people were disappointed by their inability to hear **Boris Johnson**, the ebullient mayor of London, speak at the inaugural, annual Winston Churchill lecture at the Konrad Adenauer Center in Jerusalem within the context of the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Jerusalem Foundation. The Tuesday night lecture, which was advertised last Friday in the English-language media, was instantly booked up, leaving **Orly Abuloff** at Mishkenot with the task of responding apologetically to scores of email requests from around the country that she was sorry, but there were no more tickets left.

However, those people who had been advised several weeks earlier that Johnson would be one of two keynote speakers at the Israel, Britain and the Commonwealth Association's annual Balfour Dinner at the Tel Aviv Hilton, and had reserved places, had a great time on Monday night laughing uproariously at Johnson's sophisticated ability to poke fun at himself.

But what heartened them even more was Johnson's unmitigated admiration for Israel. Johnson, 51, had first come to Israel as a 20-year-old to volunteer on a kibbutz. He had dreamed of picking oranges in a kibbutz orchard in the Galilee, but instead was put to work washing and sorting dishes. He quickly came to the realization that this was a waste of his economic potential, but this in no way diminished his admiration for Israel, and in later life he returned

to visit.

He finds certain similarities between London and Tel Aviv and London and Israel, with innovation at the top of the list. He had become very enamored with Israeli innovation after then-ambassador to the UK **Daniel Taub** had given him a copy of *Start-Up Nation: The Story of Israel's Economic Miracle*. Johnson quoted the succinct definition of Israel's innovation as coined by Peres: "from oranges to Apples."

Israel has more companies on the London Stock Exchange than any other country in the world," said Johnson, adding that he had unconsciously modeled himself on Tel Aviv Mayor **Ron Huldai**. In fact, earlier in the day, the two had gone on a bicycle tour of Tel Aviv.

After stating that both Britain and Israel have moved away from state socialism to stronger free markets, Johnson made the point: "You can't have free markets without the democracy that permeates Israel and London." The society that is willing to frequently change governments is more likely to change everything else, he said, adding that argument, exchange and debate are signs of a society that is free, plural and open.

"A free and open society in this part of the Middle East is the most amazing legacy of the Balfour Declaration," asserted Johnson. Whatever criticism of Israel there may be, it is still the case that Israel is by far the most democratic country in the region," he said, "which is why I reject completely the suggestion that of all the countries in the Middle East, this country should be the subject of a boycott."