

Psychologist advises

'Phasing out' eases divorce

By MARILYN BETMAN
With one third of today's marriages ending in divorce, Dr. Sonya K. Friedman of Birmingham has initiated "phasing out" — a concept where estranged husband and wife sit down and discuss their problems and impending divorce rationally and without bitterness. "If a divorce is imminent," said Dr. Friedman, psychologist, author and former columnist with the Observer and Eccentric, "then the task at hand is to take something sad and tragic and turn it into something positive and constructive. With this in mind, she began using her "phasing out" program with clients. Explaining the concept she said, "The cause of most divorces is selfishness and in the

course of knocking themselves out to get a divorce, a couple can do incredibly bad things to their children.

"They expect the child to understand and accept having a 'new father' and forgetting about the 'old' one."

Dr. Friedman advocates a matrimonial court system whereby a couple can sit down and arbitrate in a rational manner.

"MUCH BITTERNESS and conflict arises when the woman runs to an attorney with the idea of 'We'll get him' and the offended husband starts to fight back," she said, speaking at a luncheon of the Sisterhood of Temple Emanu-El recently. "In fact," she added, "the time to

talk about divorce is really before you get married.

"What better time to discuss such matters than when you are deeply in love with each other? It is better to make such decisions when you are ready to tear each other's hair out."

DR. FRIEDMAN predicts that there will be one million marriages in 1975, and that one out of every three will be divorced, continuing the current divorce rate.

"One of the major causes of divorce is that young couples with little experience in life take on too big a commitment through the eternal vows," she said.

"Hollywood movies that depict a couple walking off into the horizon hand in hand are pure nonsense." She cited middle age as another cause of disharmony among married people.

"Adulthood in this society is squeezed somewhere between adolescence and old age," she quipped. "Most of us are either 21 or 65, and this is wrong. A woman should be proud to admit that she is 40 or 50. "Instead of buying an expensive gift and going to a fancy restaurant once a year to celebrate an anniversary, a couple should sit down on the couch, hold hands, and seriously discuss what they can do in the coming year to make each other happier."

DR. FRIEDMAN likened the lack of communication among married partners to hesitation in going to see a doctor out of fear of being sick.

"Too many people will not ask their spouse what is wrong be-

cause they don't want to know, and this can lead to shocking surprise when one partner suddenly wants a divorce."

She emphasized her belief that couples should be encouraged to stay together for the sake of their own children.

"Our commitment to children is far more than in terms of money," she said.

"We must show our children that they are a priority in life because of our responsibility in bringing them into the world."

The Sisterhood luncheon was the third of four special programs held annually. The next luncheon is scheduled for March 10.

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