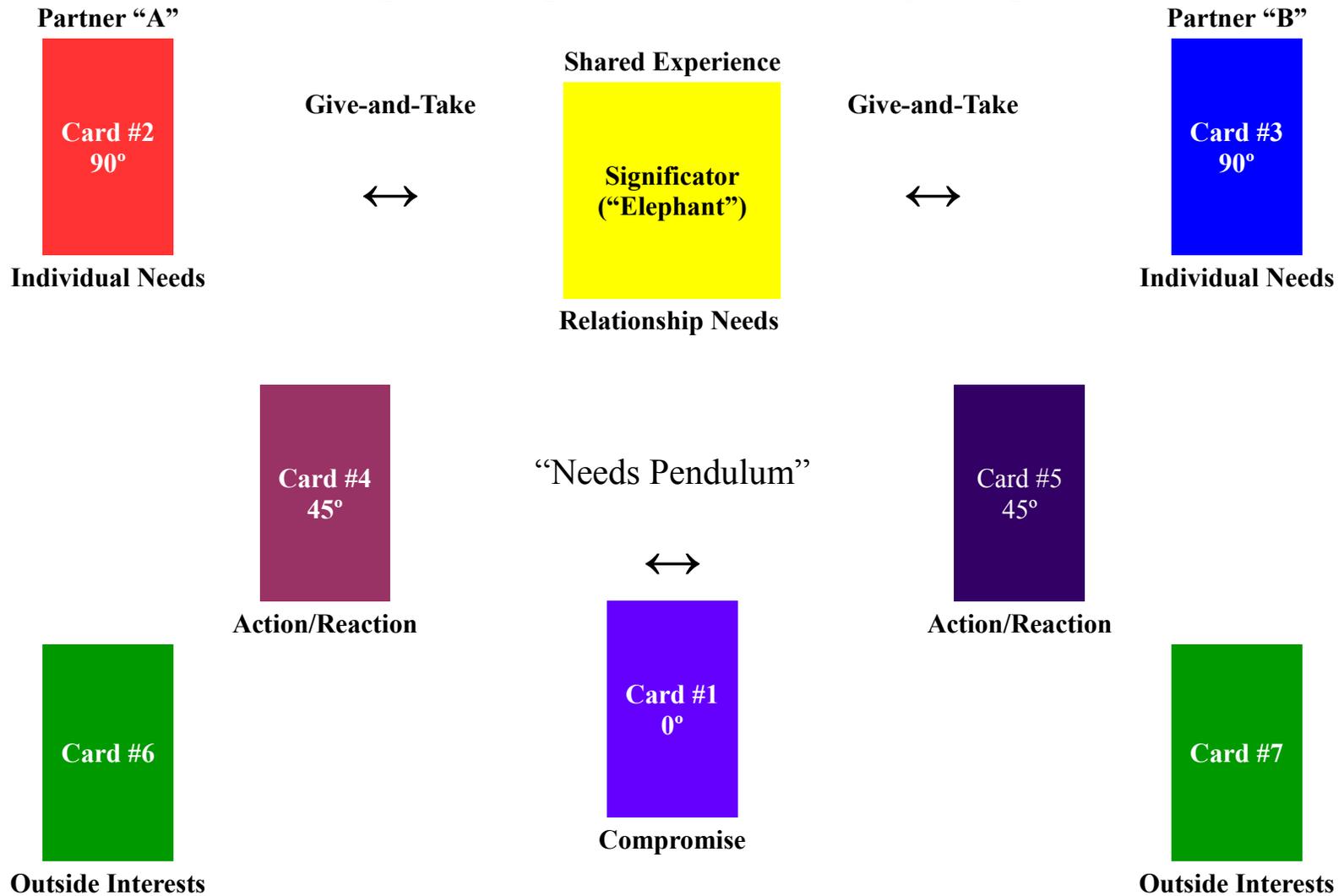


“Feeding the Elephant” Needs Analysis Spread



“Feeding the Elephant:” An Allegory

Personal relationships sometimes reach a point of dysfunction where everyone acknowledges it except the couple most intimately involved, usually because they don't want to admit failure. It's a state of denial I call the “elephant in the room” syndrome: the relationship has taken on such unseemly proportions that it's like an invisible elephant in the corner; friends and family don't want to name it so everybody politely looks away, even though the couple continues to “feed” it. The relationship assumes an exaggerated significance that dwarfs the individual needs of the partners, in effect becoming a demanding “third party” to the partnership that is “bigger than both of them.” This can degenerate into various face-saving avoidance tactics.

The idea of this spread is to identify where the “elephant” came from and find healthier ways to “feed” it before it goes rogue.

A secondary focus of this spread aligns with the idea that every relationship swings like a figurative pendulum, with the individual needs of each partner squared off against the other's expectations. In functional relationships, this pendulum swings freely with a constructive “give-and-take” to its operation. In troubled relationships, this motion can often be pulled too far to one end of its arc and simply stay there. In these scenarios, the injured party often seeks solace or even escape in outside pursuits that fill the vacuum left by the pendulum's departing sweep.

The degree of harmony and balance between the cards in the two halves of the spread will show how well or poorly the partners are attuned to one another. If one side is significantly stronger or weaker, that shows where work is needed in the relationship. If the chances for reconciliation seem remote or have already proven unattainable, the nature of the cards in the “Outside Interests” positions should be examined.

This spread uses a Significator selected to represent the relationship itself (the “elephant”) as distinct from the two parties to the situation. This could be a card like the Lovers or the 2 of Cups for romantic liaisons, the Hierophant/Pope for marriages, the 10 of Cups or 10 of Pentacles for family dynamics, the 5 of Wands for rivalries, the Page of Pentacles for student/teacher relationships, or the 3 of Pentacles or 3 of Wands for business associations. Although I haven't considered it too deeply yet, it would probably work just as well for “one-vs-many” connections like group participation. Use your imagination here.

Experience-Based Observations:

Use of this spread in a number of real-life (as opposed to theoretical test) situations suggests the following clarifications and enhancements to the positional meanings.

The “Individual Needs” positions seem to show as much or more about the individual realities that underlie those needs, and the needs themselves are often defined by the interactive dynamic between the private “worlds” of Partner “A” and Partner “B.”

The "Compromise" position frequently reveals the crux of the matter as a central issue requiring attention and resolution. Quite often it indicates the status of one partner (typically a court card) as the dominant factor in the relationship, perhaps to the detriment of the other party. So it shows an active need for head-to-head negotiation rather than a settled and passive acceptance. The pendulum may have reached a point of equilibrium, but it's just passing through, offering an opportunity for constructive dialogue but not usually showing a "done deal."

The "Outside Interests" positions have been describing the "way out" for each partner, which can appear as an avoidance of responsibility rather than as a disengaging "push" in a new direction. This development is reminiscent of "passive-aggressive" behavior. It creates buffering "space" without signifying an actual break in relations.

Overall, in the worst cases of apparent dysfunction, these spreads frequently devolve into two seemingly irreconcilable arcs that diverge into a "separate lives" scenario that is seldom resolved by the "Compromise" card. The hoped-for agreement begins to seem more like a nagging "bone of contention" than an indication of any kind of negotiable common ground. At this point, focusing on the "Outside Interests" cards may be the only way to salvage anything instructive from the reading beyond simple validation of the facts of the matter.