Introduction

The Loka Sutta is a brief and simple text meant for reflection or “meditation.” The teaching style is the same as that of the Āditta,pariyāya Sutta (S 35.28/4:19 f), where fire is used as the simile. In the Loka Sutta, the simile is an abstract one, that of “breaking up” or disintegration: the world “breaks up” (lujjati), therefore it is called “world” = “broken up” (loko). This is actually a metaphor since the reference is to the action of the world. It is not an etymological analysis but a didactic skillful means to convey the insight into the impermanence of all existence.

The Loka Sutta is closely related to the Sabba Sutta (S 35.23/4:15), where “the world” is declared to be the 12 sense-bases. The Lok’anta Gamana Sutta (S 35.11/4:93-97), where the Buddha similarly uses the word “world” (loka) in two senses: in the sense of the physical world and the world of formations, can be read as a commentary on this Loka Sutta.

The Discourse on the World
(“It breaks up”)
(S 35.82/4:52 f)

2 Then a certain monk approached the Buddha...
3 Seated thus at one side, he said this to the Blessed One:

"Venerable sir, it is called ‘The world. The world.’ In what way, venerable sir, is it called ‘the world’?"

"Bhikshu, it is ‘breaking up,’ therefore it is called ‘world’ (lujjati ti loko).

And what, bhikshu, is breaking up?

4 The eye, bhikshu, is breaking up.
Forms are breaking up.
Eye-consciousness is breaking up.
Eye-contact is breaking up.
And whatever feeling arising with eye-contact as condition—whether pleasant, painful or neutral—that too is breaking up.

5 The ear, bhikshu, is breaking up.
Sounds are breaking up.
Ear-consciousness is breaking up.
Ear-contact is breaking up.

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1 Lujjati ti loko bhikkhu tasmā loko ti vuccati. In Puppha S (S 22.94/3:139) the 5 aggregates(khandha) are called loka,dhamma (worldly conditions) because it is their nature to break up (lujjana,sabhāvattā). Here in (Lujjati) Loka S, we find loka being derived from lujjati (it breaks up). This is not a proper etymology but a wordplay with a didactic purpose. In the foll sutta, Lok’anta Gamana Sutta 1 (S 35.116/4:93-97), we find the sense-bases as the “world.”

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And whatever feeling arising with ear-contact as condition—whether pleasant, painful or neutral—that too is breaking up.

6 The nose, bhikshu, is breaking up.
Smells are breaking up.
Nose-consciousness is breaking up.
Nose-contact is breaking up.
And whatever feeling arising with nose-contact as condition—whether pleasant, painful or neutral—that too is breaking up.

7 The tongue, bhikshu, is breaking up.
Tastes are breaking up.
Tongue-consciousness is breaking up.
Tongue-contact is breaking up.
And whatever feeling arising with tongue-contact as condition—whether pleasant, painful or neutral—that too is breaking up.

8 The body, bhikshu, is breaking up.
Touches are breaking up.
Body-consciousness is breaking up.
Body-contact is breaking up.
And whatever feeling arising with body-contact as condition—whether pleasant, painful or neutral—that too is breaking up.

9 The mind, bhikshu, is breaking up.
Mind-objects are breaking up.
Mind-consciousness is breaking up.
Mind-contact is breaking up.
And whatever feeling arising with mind-contact as condition—whether pleasant, painful or neutral—that too is breaking up.

It is ‘breaking up,’ bhikshu, therefore it is called ‘world’.

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