The term *tohu* in Isa. xlv 19 has been interpreted in basically two ways, in a concrete (locative) sense and in an abstract sense. For example, the *RSV* translates the last colon as "Seek me in chaos." The *NEB* translates it as "Look for me in the empty void." The *JPS* version takes *tohu* also as a locative term, with a more concrete meaning, translating as "in a wasteland". On the other hand, the *NIV* translates *tohu* as "in vain", thus suggesting an abstract sense. A similar interpretation has been given by C. Westermann who translates *tohic* as in "im Oden (oder im Nichtigen)" and explains "*Tōhū*, meaning nothingness, that which is empty, can also have the sense of 'futile' (das Sinnlose)—the meaning would then be, 'Seek me in vain' (*Umsonst suchet mich.*)"

While the suggested translation for *tohu* varies among the modern versions, all of them understand the syntax in the same way, following the MT's punctuation (*mūnah* with *tohu*) and taking *tohu* as an adverbial phrase which modifies the verbal phrase *baqqasuni*, thus as part of the direct speech. The Targum also analyses *tohu* in the same way: ‘Seek ye the fear of me in vain’ (*Umsonst suchet mich.*)"

The LXX similarly takes *tohu* as a part of the direct speech. However, it is taken as a direct object of the verb, *Mātaiou ζητήσατε* ("Seek ye an empty thing!"). On the other hand, Symmachus' translation leaves some ambiguity in its understanding of the syntax of *tohu*:

- οὐ χρυφή ελάλησα οὔδὲ ἐν τόπῳ γῆς σκοτεινῷ·
- οὐκ εἴπον τῷ (σπέρματι) ἱκανὸς μάταιος ζητήσατε με·

Here, *χρυφή* (without a preposition ἐν) and *μάταιος* are adverbs, meaning "in secret" and "in emptiness" (or "in vain") respectively. The term *μάταιος* can modify either εἴπον or ζητήσατε. In other words the adverb *μάταιος* can be either a part of the direct speech or outside it.

It is probably correct to say that *tohu* without a preposition functions as an adverbial phrase. However, its meaning and grammatical function should be analysed in the light of the parallel
structure of this verse as a whole. In other words, tohû can be interpreted in the framework of one of the following possible poetic structures:

(1) a-b-c / B' // a'-c'-D / b'-'e
(2) a-b-c / D // a'-c'-E / b'-'f
(3) a-b-c / B' // a'-c'-D / E or a-b-c / D // a'-c'-E / F

The second structure (2) indicates that tõhû (b') corresponds with bassêter (b) "in secret" (or "secretly") rather than with the concrete expression bimqôm ेeres hosek "in a land of darkness" (D), and hence means "in vain" or the like. BHS's suggestion to read battõhû here seems to follow this pattern. However, the term tohû usually has such an abstract meaning when it appears in parallel with other abstract nouns with a similar meaning, such as ेayin "non-existence" in Isa. xl 17, 23,11 riq "empty" in xlix 4, ेepes "nothing" in xli 29 or with the phrase lô'-yô'îlû or bal-yô'îlû "unprofitable, worthless" in 1 Sam. xii 21 and Isa. xlv 9. In two other passages, tohû refers to words of the unrighteous, i.e. "false testimony" in Isa. xxix 21 and "empty argument" (NIV) in lix 4. Therefore, the correspondence of tõhû with sêter "secret" does not guarantee that tohu has an abstract meaning "empty" or the like in Isa. xlv 19.

It may be that tohû is just a part of the sarcastic expression tõhû baqqasîni "in vain seek me!" (cf. NIV) and has no grammatical correspondence with any preceding phrase. In this case, the parallel structure of this verse would be: (3) a-b-c / B' // a'-c'-D / E or a-b-c / D // a'-c'-E / F. However, since the two verbal phrases dibbarti (a) and ेamarti (a') correspond to each other according to this structure, tohû baqqasîni "In vain seek me!" should be taken as a direct object of dibbarti too. Thus, "Not in secret I spoke ... In vain seek me!" However, such an understanding is least suitable to the context. Moreover, the term tohû also appears in the preceding verse, Isa. xlv 18,12 as a term for "a desolate place", which is in opposition to an inhabited place, not as an abstract phrase such as "in vain".

The most natural structure would be (1). Here tohû (b") is in parallel with bimqôm ेeres hosek (B') "in a land of darkness". In other words, tohû without a preposition directly corresponds either to ेeres hosek or to hosek and in the last colon there is an ellipsis of an element corresponding to bimqôm or bimqôm ेeres. The former may be supported by the fact that tohû basically means "a waste